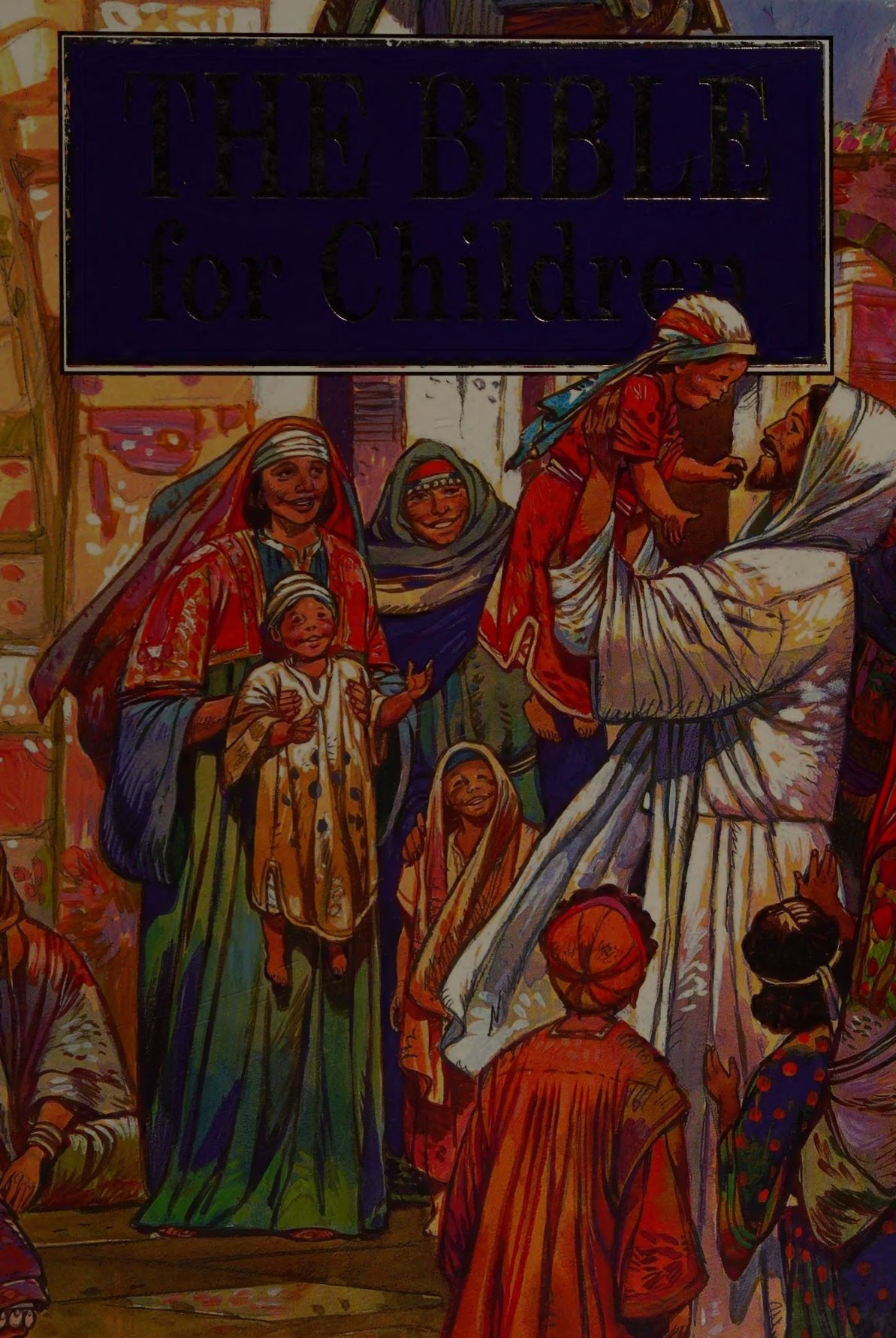
THE BIBLE
for Children

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for Children

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THE BIBLE
for Children

The Bible Society of India
#206, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Bangalore - 560001, India

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

THE BIBLE...more than a book!

The Bible is a very special book. It is really a set of books. These books were written by many different people. They lived in different places at different times.

What are these books?

Yes, the Bible contains many kinds of books. Some were written to record very important events. Some were written as letters. Some are collections of songs and poems. These books were put together and called the Bible. The original books of the Bible were written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Few people today can understand these old languages. We now have the Bible translated into almost all modern languages. The first Bible in an Indian language was in Tamil. The Bible was first translated into English about 500 years ago.

The Bible took a long time to complete. Jesus lived in Israel, almost 2,000 years ago. By that time some sets of books had been recognised as very "holy". The religious leaders knew that these books helped people to understand God and his love for them. This made those books more important than any other book. The first set of books is now called the Old Testament of the Holy Bible.

The Old Testament was put together long before the New Testament books were written. Jesus often spoke from parts of the Old Testament as he taught the people. After Jesus' life on earth, his followers wrote about him. They wrote about why he came to live on earth...what he taught...how he lived...how he died and how he rose again from the death!

Later on, the church leaders gathered these writings together to form the New Testament. They believed these writings were as "holy" as the Old Testament books.

THE BIBLE ... The Book you are now reading

This book has been put together especially for you. It contains very important and interesting parts chosen from the Bible. The titles and introductions have been added to help you. After each title you will find the name of the book and the chapter from which the passage is taken (e.g. Genesis 13). This will help you to find the same passage in the Bible.

After you finish reading this book, you may want to read the whole Bible. The Bible is the world's most widely read book. Year after year, more copies of the Bible are sold than any other book ever printed.

Happy reading!

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This is God's world

THE BEGINNING

Long long ago, there was nothing – except God. No people, no world, no time – nothing! Do you find this hard to believe? Yet this is where the story told in the Bible begins.

The first book in the Bible is called "Genesis." It is the book of beginnings. It tells us that everything began with God. Nothing came by chance. God made everything – the world, the people, the planets, the universe. Everything God created was perfect. He wanted men and women, boys and girls, animals and plants, to be at peace and in harmony. Then something terrible happened. It looked as though everything would be lost and all God's plans spoiled. But no, God had a wonderful answer to this problem.

As you read through this book, you can see how God solved this problem. You can discover for yourself that God wants you to enjoy life in a wonderful way.

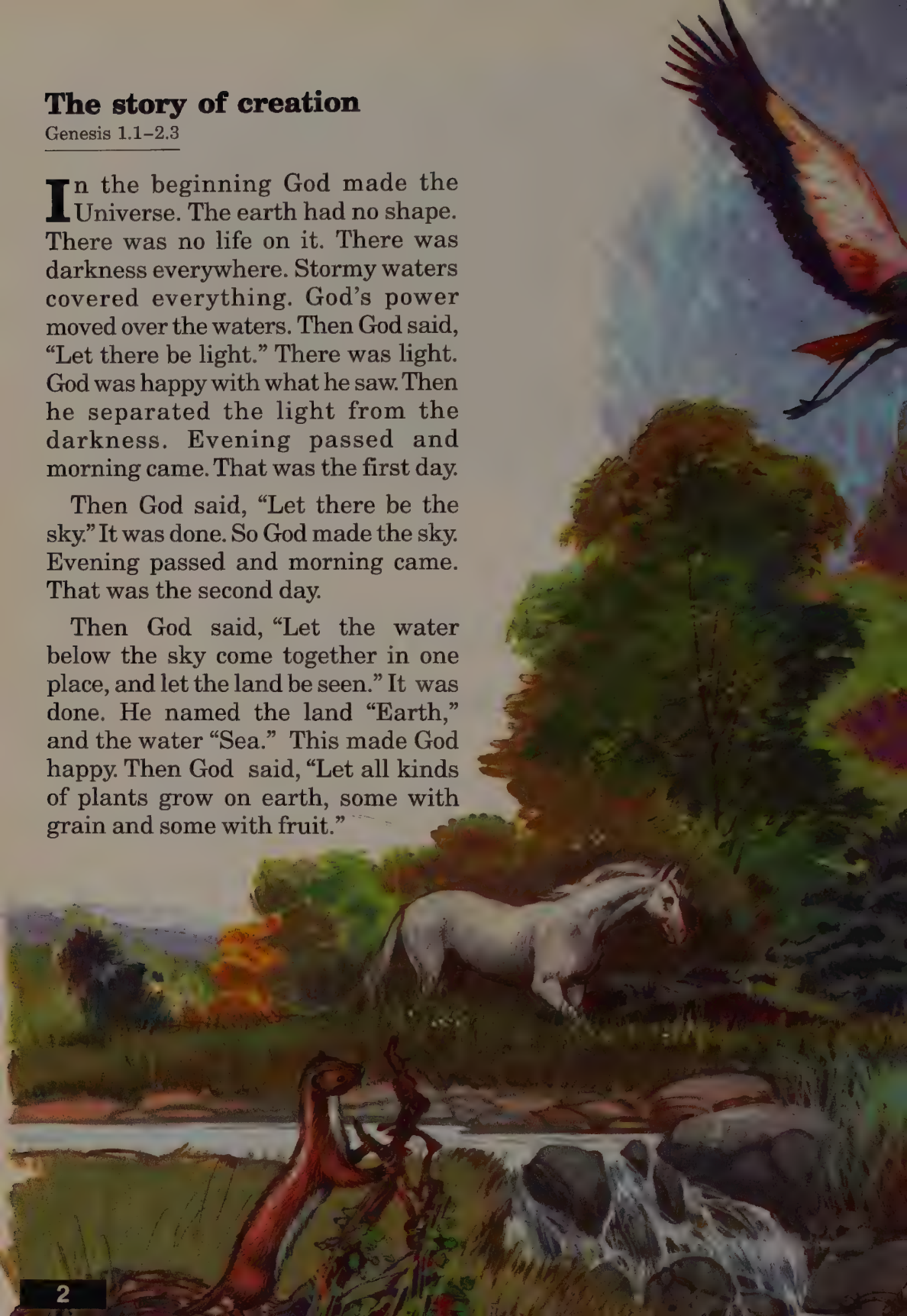
The story of creation

Genesis 1.1–2.3

In the beginning God made the Universe. The earth had no shape. There was no life on it. There was darkness everywhere. Stormy waters covered everything. God's power moved over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light." There was light. God was happy with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness. Evening passed and morning came. That was the first day.

Then God said, "Let there be the sky." It was done. So God made the sky. Evening passed and morning came. That was the second day.

Then God said, "Let the water below the sky come together in one place, and let the land be seen." It was done. He named the land "Earth," and the water "Sea." This made God happy. Then God said, "Let all kinds of plants grow on earth, some with grain and some with fruit."



It was done. This made God happy. Evening passed and morning came. That was the third day.

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night. Let them shine in the sky to give light to the earth. Let them also show the days, years, and seasons." It was done. Evening passed and morning came. That was the fourth day.

Then God said, "Let there be many kinds of living things in the water. Let there be all kinds of birds in the air." It was done. Each living thing in the sea and each bird had young ones like themselves. God wanted the best for them. Evening passed and morning came. That was the fifth day.

So God made all kinds of animals, and he was happy.

Then God said, "Now we will make people. They will be like us. They will have power over the fish and the birds. They will also have power over all the large and small animals, the tame ones and the wild ones." So God made people to be like himself. He

made them man and woman. He blessed them and said, "Have many children. Let them live everywhere on earth and look after it. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the animals. I have given you all kinds of grain and fruit to eat. All the animals and birds will have grass and plants as food." And it was done. God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased. Evening passed and morning came. That was the sixth day.

So the whole world was completed. By the seventh day God had finished making everything. Then he rested. He made the seventh day special and a day of rest.

The garden of Eden

Genesis 2.8-9,15-17

Then the LORD God made a garden, in a place called Eden. There he put the man he had made. He made all kinds of beautiful fruit trees. In the middle of the garden were two trees: the tree that gives life and the tree that helps people to know good and evil. Then the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to look after it. He told him, "You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden. But do not eat the fruit of the tree that helps you to know good and evil. If you do, you will surely die."

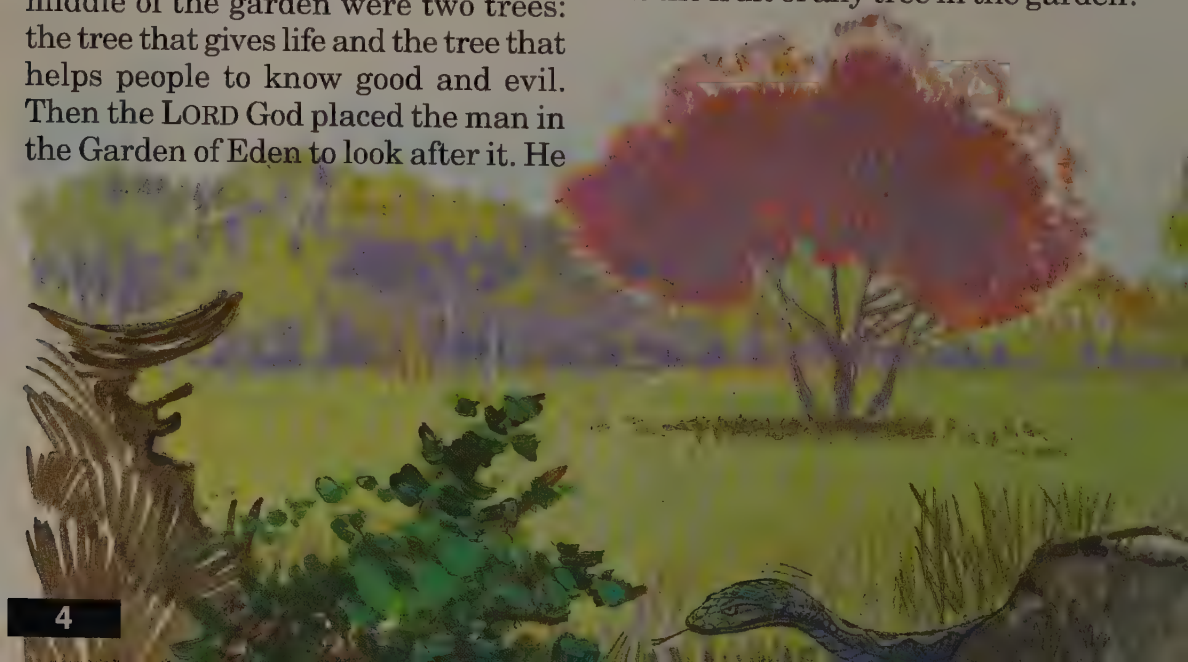
HOW THINGS WENT WRONG

The first people disobey God

Genesis 3.1-15,20-23

This is the story about the first man "Adam" and his wife "Eve". It gives the answer to the question many people ask, "If God made everything good, why is there evil in the world?" God wanted Adam and Eve and us to be happy. True happiness is for those who obey God.

Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat the fruit of any tree in the garden?"



The woman answered, "We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, but not from the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat its fruit or even touch it. If we do, we will die."

The snake replied, "That's not true. You will not die. God said that because he knows that when you eat it, you will be like God. You will know good and evil."

The woman thought, "What a beautiful tree! It would be good to eat its fruit. How wonderful it would be to become wise." So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband. He also ate it. At once they knew they could understand good and evil. They knew they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves.

That evening they heard the LORD God walking in the garden. They hid from him among the trees. But the LORD God called out to the man, "Adam, where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you walking in the garden. I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked."

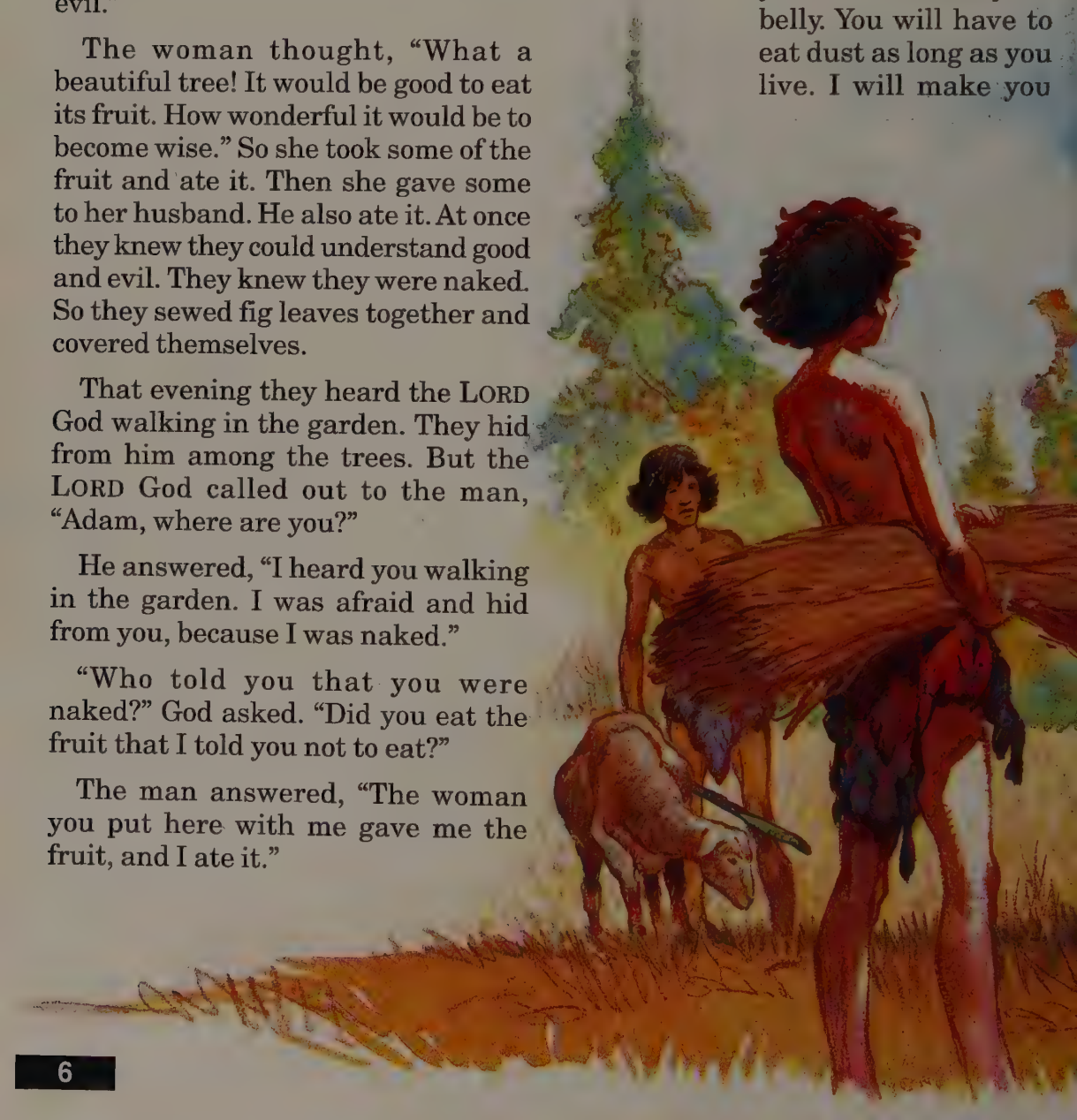
"Who told you that you were naked?" God asked. "Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?"

The man answered, "The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit, and I ate it."

The LORD God asked the woman, "Why did you do this?"

She replied, "The snake made me believe. So I ate it."

Then the LORD God said to the snake, "You will be punished for this. Of all the animals, you alone will be cursed. From now on you will crawl on your belly. You will have to eat dust as long as you live. I will make you



and the woman hate each other. Her children and your offspring will also be enemies. Her child will crush your head. You will bite his heel."
God also cursed both Adam and Eve that they would suffer pain.

Adam named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all human beings. The LORD God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and Eve, and he clothed them.

Then the LORD God said, "Now the man has become like one of us, for he knows good and evil. We must not let him eat the fruit of the tree that gives life. If he does, he will live forever." So the LORD God sent him out of the Garden of Eden. From then on he had to work hard and grow his own food in the ground from which God had made him.

The first quarrel

Genesis 4.2-7

In this story we read what happens when people do not follow God's ways. Cain and Abel were the children of Adam and Eve.

Abel was a shepherd. Cain was a farmer. One day Cain offered crops from his field to the LORD. Abel brought the first lamb born to one of his sheep. He killed it and gave its best parts to the LORD. The LORD was pleased with Abel and his offering. But he was not pleased with Cain and his offering. Cain became very angry. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you looking so angry? You have not

offered the right thing, so you are unhappy. Sin is ready to catch you. Sin wants to control you, but you must control sin."

The first murder

Genesis 4.8-16

One day Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the fields." When they got there, Cain killed his brother.

The LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He answered, "I don't know. Is it my job to look after my brother?"

Then the LORD said, "Why have you done this wicked thing? You must be punished for killing your brother. You are now under a curse. You cannot grow anything. You killed your brother, so the soil will not produce crops for you. You will have no home anywhere."

Cain said to the LORD "This punishment is too much for me. You are driving me away from the land and from you. If I have no home, anyone who finds me will kill me."

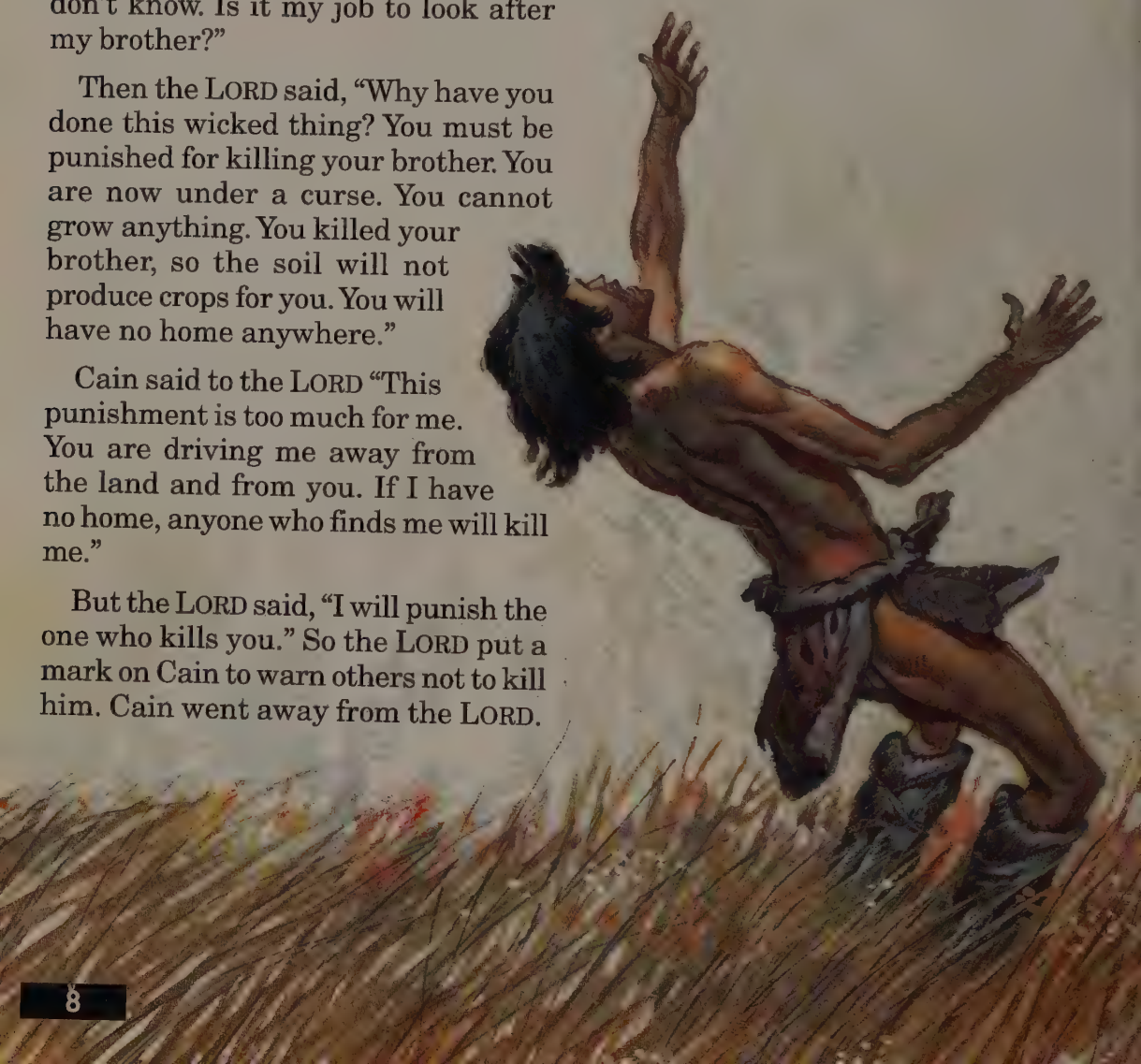
But the LORD said, "I will punish the one who kills you." So the LORD put a mark on Cain to warn others not to kill him. Cain went away from the LORD.

PUNISHMENT AND MERCY

"Why did I make people?"

Genesis 6.5-10

God saw that people did not live as he wanted. He knew they were harming each other and spoiling everything he had made.



After a time the earth was filled with evil people. They always had evil thoughts. The LORD was sorry he had made them. He said, "I will destroy these wicked people, along with the animals and birds." But the LORD was pleased with a man called Noah.

This is the story of Noah. He had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Noah was the only good man at that time. He was God's friend. Noah did things which made God happy.

"Build a boat!"

Genesis 6.13-22

God said to Noah, "I am going to get rid of all these people. They are making the world a bad place to live in. Build a very large boat for yourself. Use good wood. I will give you the measurements. Make rooms in it. Cover it with tar inside and outside. I will send a flood on the earth. It will destroy every living thing. But I will give you a promise. Go into the boat with your wife. Take also your sons, and their wives. Take into the boat a male and a female of every kind of animal and bird. Gather all kinds of food and store it for yourselves and the animals." Noah did everything that God told him.

"Go into the boat!"

Genesis 7.1-12,19,24

In many countries very old stories tell of a great flood. This story tells us that God punished evil with a flood. But he saved those who obeyed him.

When the boat was ready, the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the boat with your whole family. I know you are the only one in all the world who does what is right. Take with you seven pairs of each kind of animal and bird that can be eaten. But take only one pair of each of the other kind. In this way every kind of animal and bird will be kept alive. Later they can fill the earth with their young ones. Seven days from now I am going to send rain for 40 days continuously. It will destroy all the living things that I have made." Again Noah did everything that the LORD told him. He, his wife, his sons and their wives, went into the boat. They took into the boat animals and birds as God had said. Then the LORD shut the door of the boat. Seven days later the flood came.

This happened when Noah was 600 years old. There was rain for 40 days continuously. All the water under the earth together with all the water from the sky made a great flood. Noah's boat floated on the water. The water rose up and covered all the mountains. It was about seven metres above the highest mountain. The water remained there for 150 days.

"Get out of the boat!"

Genesis 8.1-22

God did not forget Noah and all the animals in the boat. The water stopped coming from under the earth. The rain from the sky also stopped. The water went down and down for 150 days. At last, the boat came to rest on Mount Ararat. The water kept going down until the tops of the mountains could be seen.

After 40 days, Noah opened a window and sent out a raven. It did not come back. It flew around until the water was completely gone. Then Noah sent out a dove to see if the land was dry. But water still covered all the land. The dove did not find a place to rest. It flew back to the boat, and Noah took it in. After a week, he sent the dove out again. It returned to him in the evening with a fresh leaf in its beak. So Noah knew that the water had gone down. After another week, he sent out the dove once more. This time it did not come back.

Now Noah removed the covering of the boat. He looked around and saw that the ground was getting dry. At last the earth was fully dry. By now Noah was 601 years old.

God said to Noah, "Get out of the boat with your family. Take all the birds and animals with you. Let them have many young ones and live everywhere." So Noah went out of the

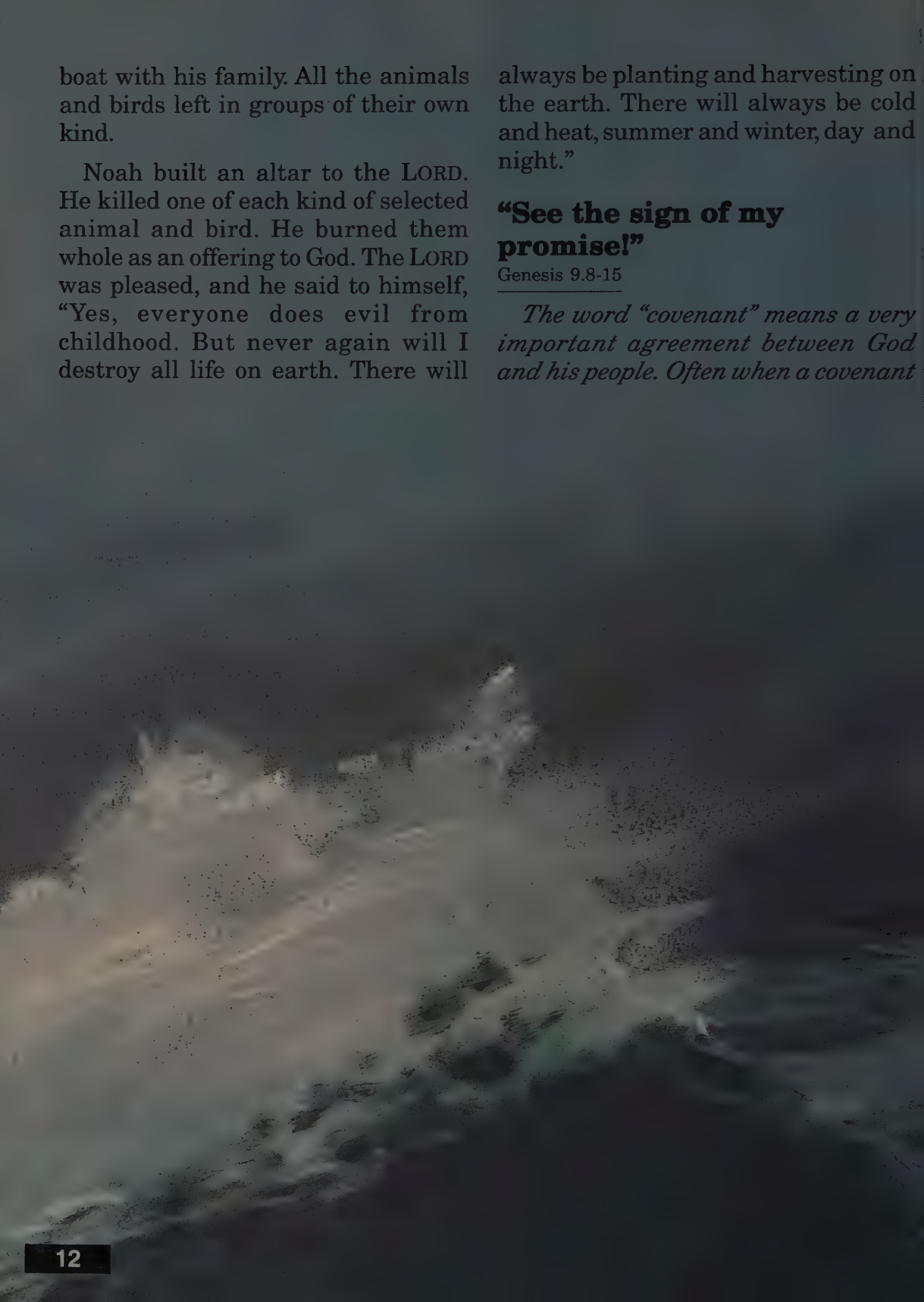
boat with his family. All the animals and birds left in groups of their own kind.

Noah built an altar to the LORD. He killed one of each kind of selected animal and bird. He burned them whole as an offering to God. The LORD was pleased, and he said to himself, "Yes, everyone does evil from childhood. But never again will I destroy all life on earth. There will always be planting and harvesting on the earth. There will always be cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night."

"See the sign of my promise!"

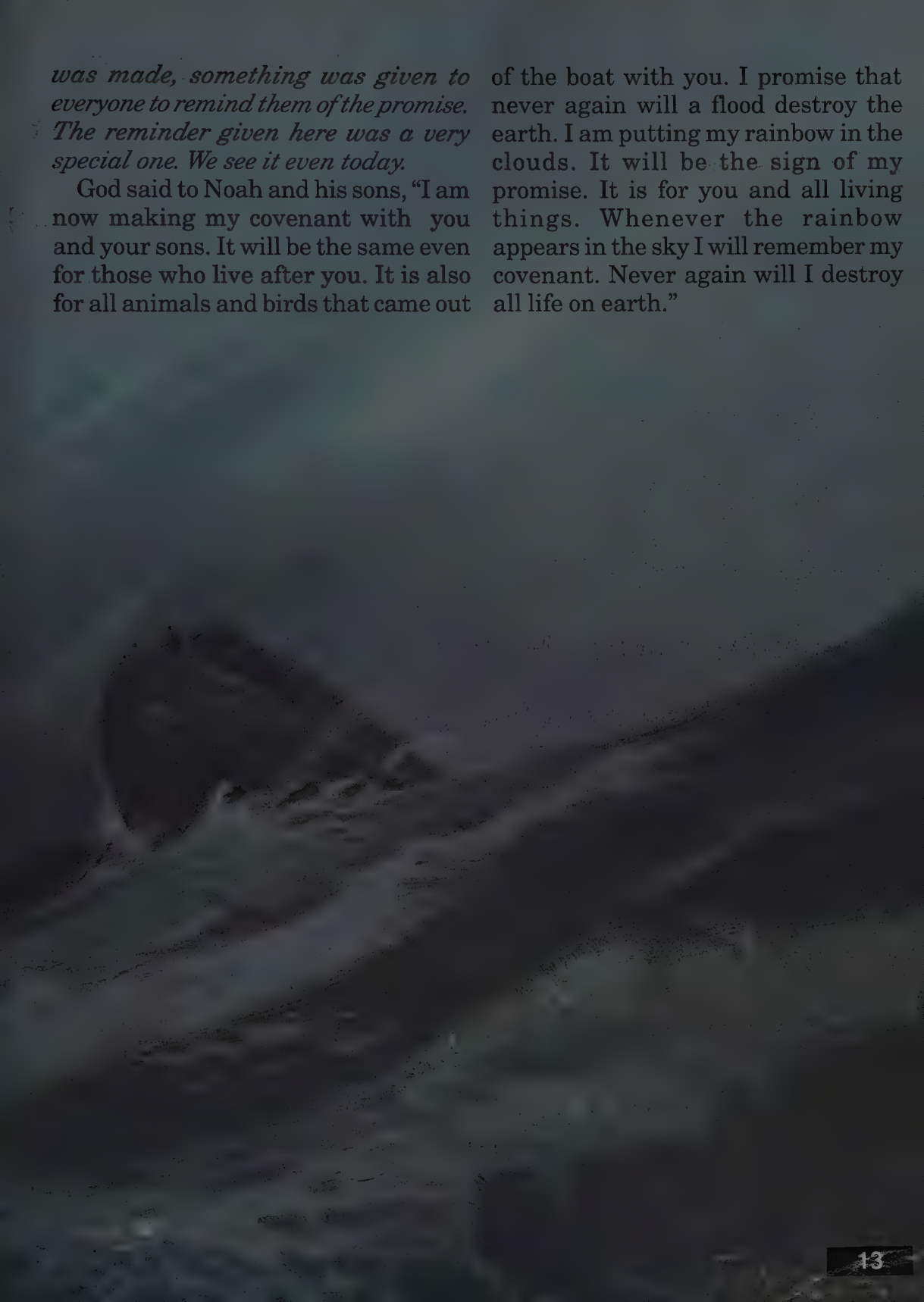
Genesis 9.8-15

The word "covenant" means a very important agreement between God and his people. Often when a covenant



was made, something was given to everyone to remind them of the promise. The reminder given here was a very special one. We see it even today.

God said to Noah and his sons, "I am now making my covenant with you and your sons. It will be the same even for those who live after you. It is also for all animals and birds that came out of the boat with you. I promise that never again will a flood destroy the earth. I am putting my rainbow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my promise. It is for you and all living things. Whenever the rainbow appears in the sky I will remember my covenant. Never again will I destroy all life on earth."



The nation of Israel begins

All the stories we have read so far happened in a place called Mesopotamia. Today this is part of Iraq.

The stories in this chapter are about Abram and the members of his family. We read how people began to learn what God was like and how he wanted them to live.

THE FATHER OF NATIONS

God chooses Abram

Genesis 12.1-7

The people in Mesopotamia and in other lands believed in many gods. They worshipped the sun, moon, and stars. Abram was different. He believed in one true God or "The Lord", who made the sun, moon, and stars. He told Abram to leave his home and people and go to a country far away. God promised to give that new country to him and his children.

The LORD said to Abram, "I want to take you to another country. You must leave your home and country. I will give you many children and grandchildren. Your family will one day become a great nation. I will make you happy. Your name will be well known. You will bring happiness to many.

I will bring happiness to those
who bless you.
But I will bring trouble to those
who bring you trouble.
Through you I will bless all
the nations."

Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. His wife Sarai and his nephew Lot went with him. Abram was a rich man and had many slaves and animals. He took all his riches with him and came to the land of Canaan.

Abram travelled many miles until he came to a place called Shechem. Here was a holy tree where the people worshipped their god. The LORD showed himself to Abram and said, "One day I will give this land to your people." Then Abram built an altar there and gave offerings to the LORD on it.

Canaan was later called Israel. God changed Abram's name to Abraham which means "father of many nations." Sarai's name was changed to Sarah which means "princess." Many years later, when Abraham and Sarah were very old, God gave them a son, Isaac.

God prepares Abraham

Genesis 22.1-18

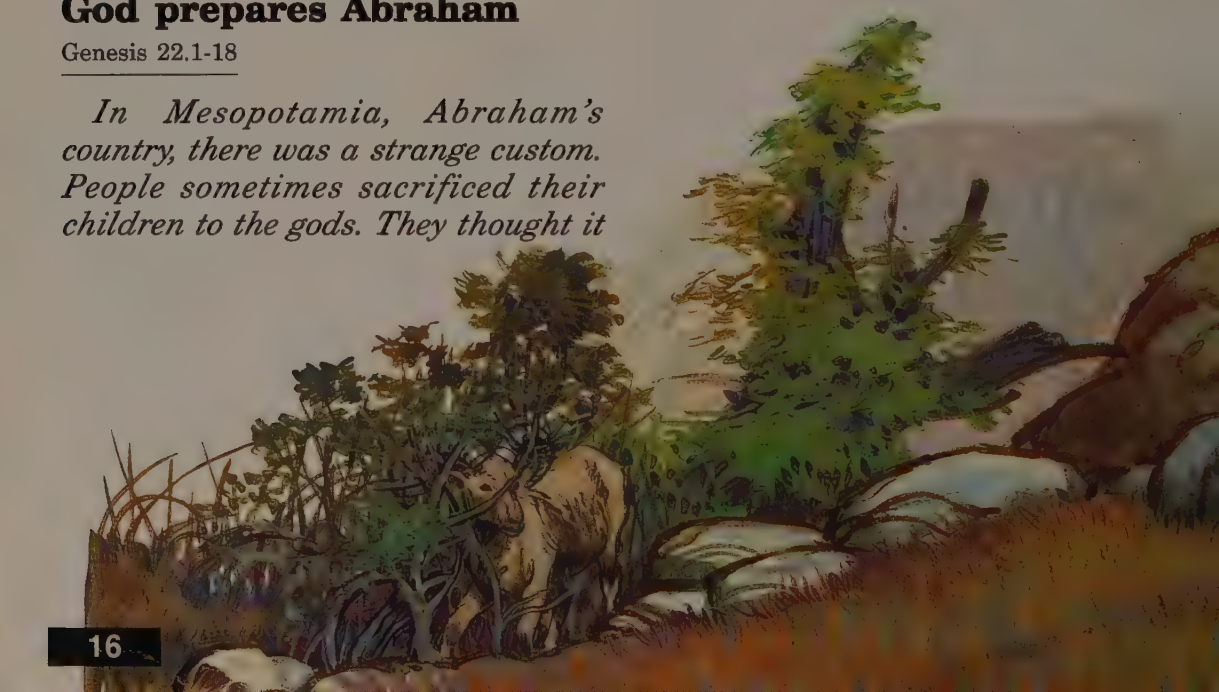
In Mesopotamia, Abraham's country, there was a strange custom. People sometimes sacrificed their children to the gods. They thought it was a way of giving thanks for the gift of children. They felt the gods would give them many more.

God wanted to test Abraham. He called him and said, "I know you love your only son, Isaac, very much. Now take him to the land of Moriah. There I will show you a mountain. On it you must offer him as a sacrifice to me."

Early the next morning Abraham started out for Moriah with Isaac. He took two servants and a donkey carrying firewood for the sacrifice. On the third day Abraham saw the mountain far away. Then he said to the servants, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship the LORD and then come back."

Abraham put the firewood on Isaac. He carried a knife and burning coals.

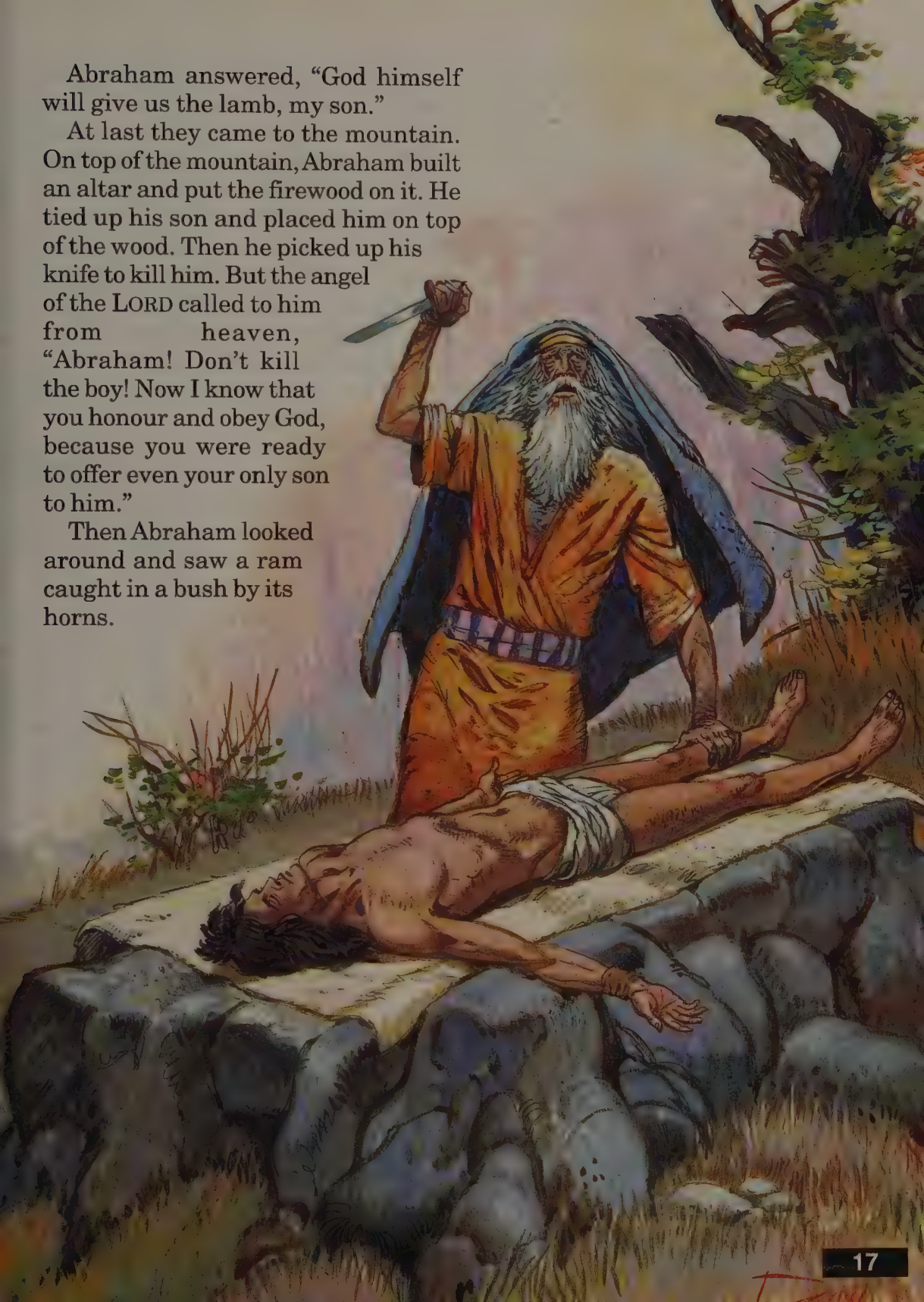
On the way Isaac asked his father, "Father, we have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"



Abraham answered, "God himself will give us the lamb, my son."

At last they came to the mountain. On top of the mountain, Abraham built an altar and put the firewood on it. He tied up his son and placed him on top of the wood. Then he picked up his knife to kill him. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Don't kill the boy! Now I know that you honour and obey God, because you were ready to offer even your only son to him."

Then Abraham looked around and saw a ram caught in a bush by its horns.



He untied Isaac, took the ram and sacrificed it on the altar. It was a burnt-offering to the LORD Abraham named that place YAHWEH-JIREH which means, The LORD Provides.

Again the angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven. The LORD said, "Because you were ready to offer your only son to me, I promise that I will bless you very much. You will be the great grandfather of many many people. Your people will capture their enemies. Other people everywhere will be blessed as I have blessed your people, because you have obeyed me."

God provides a wife for Isaac

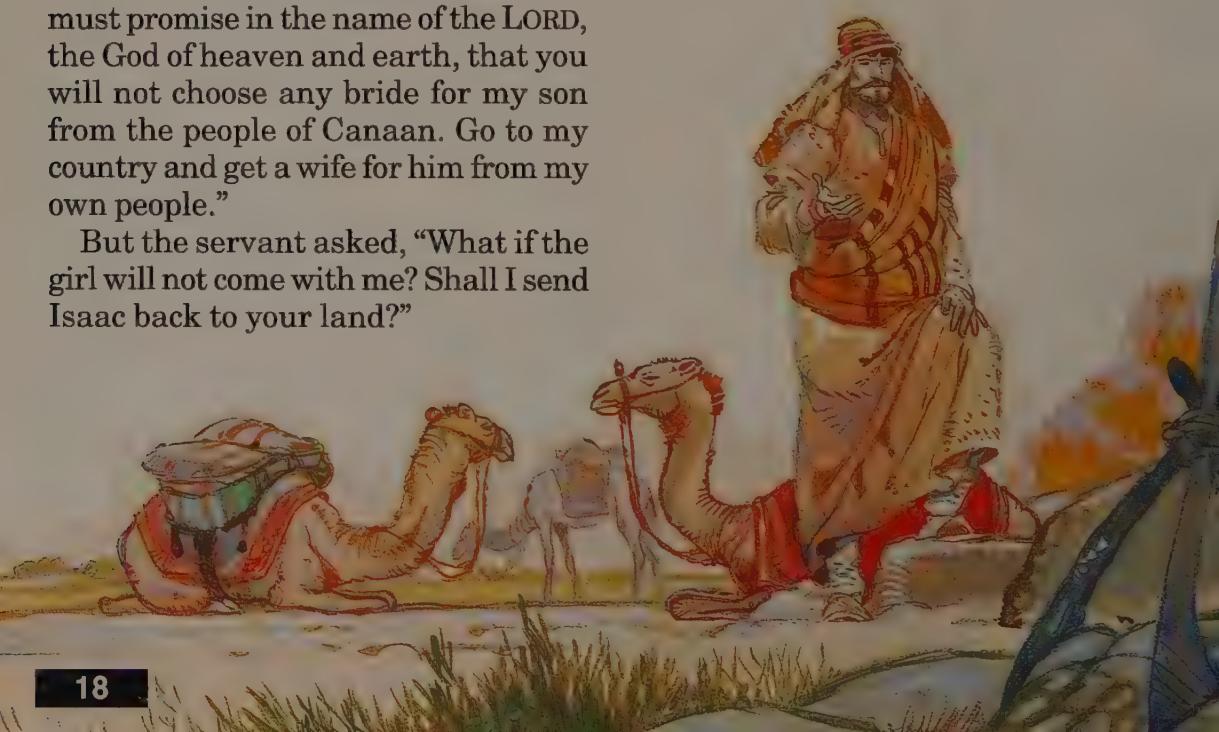
Genesis 24.1-28

Abraham was getting very old. The LORD had blessed him very much. One day he said to his oldest servant, "I want you to find a wife for Isaac. You must promise in the name of the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not choose any bride for my son from the people of Canaan. Go to my country and get a wife for him from my own people."

But the servant asked, "What if the girl will not come with me? Shall I send Isaac back to your land?"

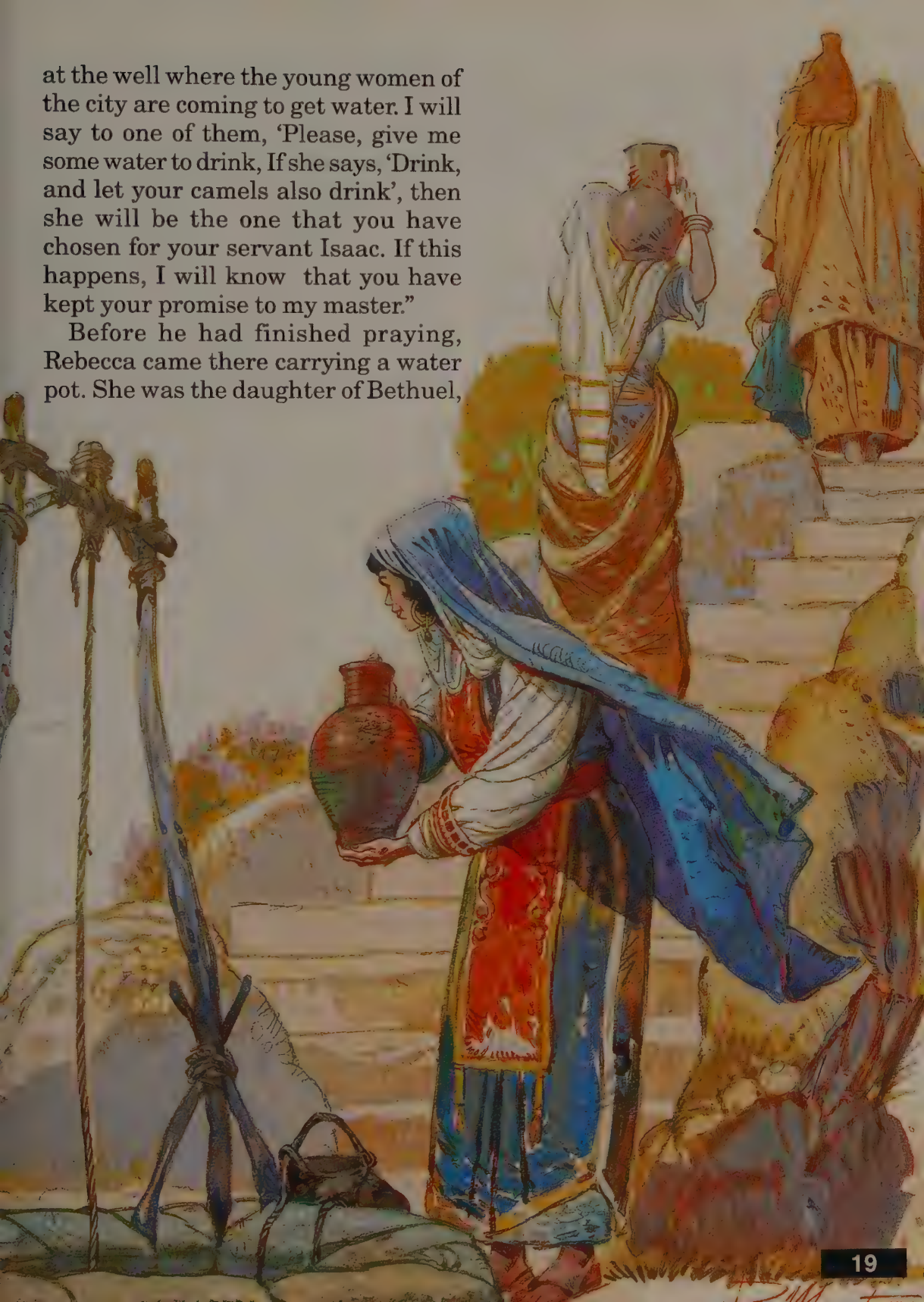
Abraham answered, "Be sure not to send my son back there! The LORD brought me from my home and my people. He gave me a sure promise that he would give this land to my children and their children's children. He will send his angel before you to help you get a wife for my son. If the girl is not willing to come, you will be free from this promise. But you must never agree to send my son back there." So the servant made a promise to do what Abraham wanted.

The servant took ten of his master's camels and went to the home town of Abraham. When he arrived, it was late afternoon. Women were coming to get water from the well outside the city. He made the camels rest there. He prayed, "LORD, God of my master Abraham, help me today and keep your promise to my master. Here I am



at the well where the young women of the city are coming to get water. I will say to one of them, 'Please, give me some water to drink, If she says, 'Drink, and let your camels also drink', then she will be the one that you have chosen for your servant Isaac. If this happens, I will know that you have kept your promise to my master."

Before he had finished praying, Rebecca came there carrying a water pot. She was the daughter of Bethuel,



Abraham's nephew. She was a very beautiful girl. She went down to the well, filled her water pot, and came back. Abraham's servant ran to her and said, "Please give me a drink of water."

She said, "Drink, sir," and quickly poured water for him. When he had finished drinking, she said, "I will also bring enough water for your camels." Soon she had given water to all the camels. Quietly the servant watched her to make sure that the LORD had shown him the right girl.

When she had finished, the man gave her a costly gold nose ring and two large gold bangles. He asked her, "Who is your father? Is there place in your house for my men and me to stay tonight?"

"My father is Bethuel," she answered. "There is plenty of straw for your camels. There is enough place at home for all of you to stay."

Then Abraham's servant knelt down and thanked the LORD. He said, "Praise the LORD. He has surely kept his promise to my master. The LORD has led me straight to my master's people!"

Then Rebecca ran to her house and told the whole story.

Abraham's servant was given a warm welcome. He told Rebecca's family about Abraham and Isaac. He told them why he had come and about his prayer. So it seemed to them that God really wanted Rebecca to be Isaac's wife. They let her go with the servant to be married to Isaac.

THE STORY OF JACOB

Esau and Jacob

Genesis 25.24-34

The custom in those days was for the first son to get his father's last blessings. He would get two-thirds of the family property after his father's death. He also made all the important decisions for the family. These were the rights of the eldest son.

The time came for Rebecca to give birth, and she had twin sons. The first one was reddish, and he had hair all over his body. He was called Esau which means "hairy." The second one was born holding on to the heel of Esau. He was called Jacob which means "a cheat." Isaac was 60 years old when they were born.

The boys grew up. Esau loved the countryside and became a good hunter. Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home. Isaac was fond of Esau, because he enjoyed eating the meat of the animals Esau killed. Rebecca was fond of Jacob.

One day while Jacob was cooking some bean soup, Esau came in from hunting and said to Jacob, "I'm very hungry. Give me some of that red soup."

Jacob answered, "You can have it, but you must give me your birth rights.

Esau said, "I'm so hungry. I'm about to die! I don't care for my rights. Give me the soup."

Jacob answered, "First promise that you will give me your rights." So Esau

made the promise and gave his rights to Jacob. Then Jacob gave him some bread and some of the soup. He ate and drank and then left. He did not care any more about his rights.

Jacob cheats his father

Genesis 27.1-41

It was very important for Isaac to bless his eldest son before he died. If he did this, his son would receive what God promised to give to Isaac's descendants.

Isaac was now old and blind. He called Esau, his first son, and said, "Son, you see that I am old. I may not live very long. Go and hunt an animal for me. Cook it the way I like it, and bring it to me. I will eat it, and give you my final blessing before I die." While Isaac was talking to Esau, Rebecca was listening. So when Esau went out to hunt, she said to Jacob, "I have just heard your father say to Esau, Bring me an animal and cook it for me. After I have eaten it, I will give you my final blessing before I die. Now, son," Rebecca continued, "listen to what I say. Go to the flock and pick out two young goats. I shall prepare a meal that your father likes very much. You can take it to him to eat. Then he will bless you before he dies."

Jacob answered, "But Esau is hairy, and my skin is smooth. My father may touch me and find out that I am cheating him. Then I will bring a curse on myself instead of a blessing."

His mother said, "My son, let the curse be on me. Go and get the goats. I will tell you what to do." So Jacob brought the goats to her, and she cooked a tasty meal for his father. Then she took Esau's best clothes and put them on Jacob. She put the skins of the goats on his arms and on his neck. She gave him the tasty meat and the bread she had made.

Then Jacob went to his father and said, "Father!" Isaac asked, "Who are you, my son?"

Jacob answered, "I am your first son Esau. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of the meat that I have brought you. Then bless me."

Isaac said, "How did you find it so quickly, son?" Jacob answered, "The LORD your God helped me."

Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come closer. Let me touch you. Are you really Esau?" Jacob moved closer to his father.

Isaac felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's, but your arms feel like Esau's." He did not know it was Jacob, because his arms were hairy like Esau's. Before he gave his blessing, Isaac asked again, "Are you really Esau?" "I am," he answered.

Isaac said, "Bring me some of the meat. After I eat it, I will bless you." Jacob brought it, along with some wine. Then his father said to him, "Come near and kiss me, son." As he came up to kiss him, Isaac smelled his clothes. Then he gave him his blessing. He said, "The sweet smell of my son is like the smell of a field blessed by the LORD. May God give you dew from above and make your fields fertile! May he give you plenty of grain and wine! May many people serve you and honour you. May you rule over your

own people, and may they honour you. May God curse those who curse you and bless those who bless you."

Isaac finished blessing Jacob. As soon as he left, his brother Esau came in from hunting. He also cooked a tasty meal and took it to his father. He said, "Father, please sit up and eat the meat that I have brought, and bless me."

"Who are you?" Isaac asked. "Your first son Esau," he answered.

Isaac began to tremble and shake! He asked, "Then who was it, who brought me meat? I ate it just before you came in. I have blessed him, and I cannot take it back."

When Esau heard this, he was very upset. He cried loudly and said, "Bless me also, father!"

Isaac answered, "Your brother cheated me. He has taken away your blessing."

Esau said, "This is the second time he has cheated me. No wonder his

name is Jacob. He took my rights as the eldest son, and now he has taken away my blessing. Don't you have even one blessing for me?"

Isaac answered, "I have already blessed him. He will rule over you. All his relatives will serve him. He will also have grain and wine. Now there is no blessing left for you, son!"

But Esau continued to beg of his father, "Do you have a blessing for only one son, father? Bless me too, father!" He began to cry.

Then Isaac said to him,

"No dew from the sky for you, No good fields for you.
You will be your brother's servant, but you will be a fighter.
When you fight back, you will be a free man."

Esau hated Jacob, because his father had given the blessing to Jacob. He thought, "I will wait till my father dies. Then I will kill him!"

A ladder to heaven

Genesis 28.11-22

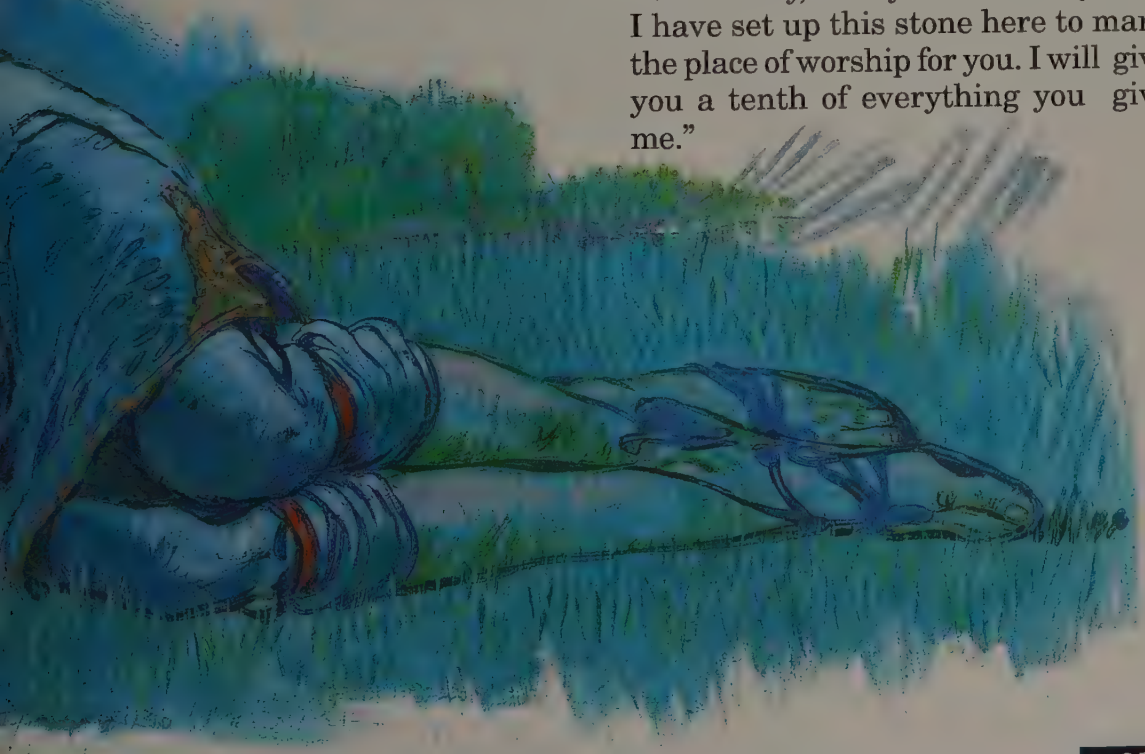
Rebecca heard of Esau's plan to kill Jacob. So she told Jacob to run away to her brother's home in Mesopotamia. She knew Jacob would be safe in that far away place.

At sunset Jacob came to a place where he spent the night. He lay down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. He had a dream. He saw a ladder between earth and heaven.

Angels were going up and coming down. And there was the LORD standing by him. "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham and Isaac," he said. "I will give this land to you and your children. They will become large in number. They will spread everywhere. Through you and your children I will bless all the nations. Remember, I will be with you and keep you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all that I have promised you."

Jacob woke up and said, "The LORD is in this place, but I didn't know it!" He was afraid and said, "The place really frightens me! It must be the house of God. It must be the gate of heaven."

He took the stone that was under his head and set it up to mark the place. Then he poured oil on it to make it a special place. He named it "Bethel" which means "House of God." Then Jacob made a promise, "LORD, if you will be with me, and keep me on my way and give me food and clothing, and if you bring me back home safely, then you will be my God. I have set up this stone here to mark the place of worship for you. I will give you a tenth of everything you give me."



Jacob wrestles with God

Genesis 32.23-31

Jacob arrived safely at his uncle Laban's house. He worked for many years caring for Laban's flocks. He married Laban's daughters Leah and Rachel. Jacob had many children and became rich. Later, Jacob decided to return home. He and his family started their journey. But Jacob was afraid to meet his brother whom he had cheated. He sent his servants ahead of him with his flocks. He planned to give his brother 500 animals. He hoped this big present would help Esau forgive him.

After Jacob had sent all his family and flocks across the river, he stayed behind alone. That night a man came and wrestled with Jacob until the sun came up. The man saw that he was not winning, so he hit Jacob's hip and Jacob had a sprain. The man said, "Let me go, daylight is coming."

Jacob answered, "I won't, unless you

bless me."

"What is your name?" the man asked.

"Jacob," he answered.

The man said, "Your name will not be Jacob anymore. You have wrestled with God and with men, and you have won. So your name will be Israel."

Jacob said, "Now tell me your name."

But he answered, "Why do you want to know my name?" Then he blessed Jacob.

Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive." So he named the place "Peniel" which means "the Face of God." The sun rose as Jacob was leaving Peniel. He was limping because of the sprain.

That same day, the two brothers met. Jacob's fear of his brother was gone as soon as Esau ran to him. They hugged and kissed each other. They wept tears of joy. They talked together for a while. Then Esau started on his way back to Edom. Jacob and all with him travelled slowly. They arrived safely at the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan. Jacob was back in his home country again.

THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Joseph and his brothers

Genesis 37.1-35

This is the story of Jacob's favourite son Joseph. Joseph had two dreams and told his brothers about them. Dreams were thought to be messages from God. When Joseph explained his dreams, he was really saying, "God is speaking."

Jacob stayed on in the land of Canaan where his father had lived. This is the story of Jacob's family. Joseph was 17 years old. He took care of the sheep and goats with his brothers. He used to bring bad reports to his father about what his brothers did.

Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons, because he had been born to him when he was old. He made a special robe for him. His brothers knew that their father loved Joseph more than he loved them. So they hated him and were rude to him.

Once Joseph had a dream. When he told his brothers about it, they hated him even more. He said, "Listen to the dream I had. We were all in the field harvesting wheat. When we were tying up the bundles, my bundle stood up straight. Your bundles came around mine and bowed to it."

"Do you think you are going to be a king and rule over us?" his brothers asked. So they hated him even more because of his dreams and what he said about them.

Later Joseph had a second dream. He said to his brothers, "I had another dream. I saw the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowing to me."

He told this dream to his father also. His father scolded him, "What kind of a dream is that? Do you think that your mother, your brothers, and I are going to come and bow down to you?" Joseph's

brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept thinking about it all.

Joseph's brothers had gone to Shechem to take care of their father's sheep and goats.

Jacob said to Joseph, "Go to Shechem and see if your brothers and the flocks are all right. Then come back and tell me."

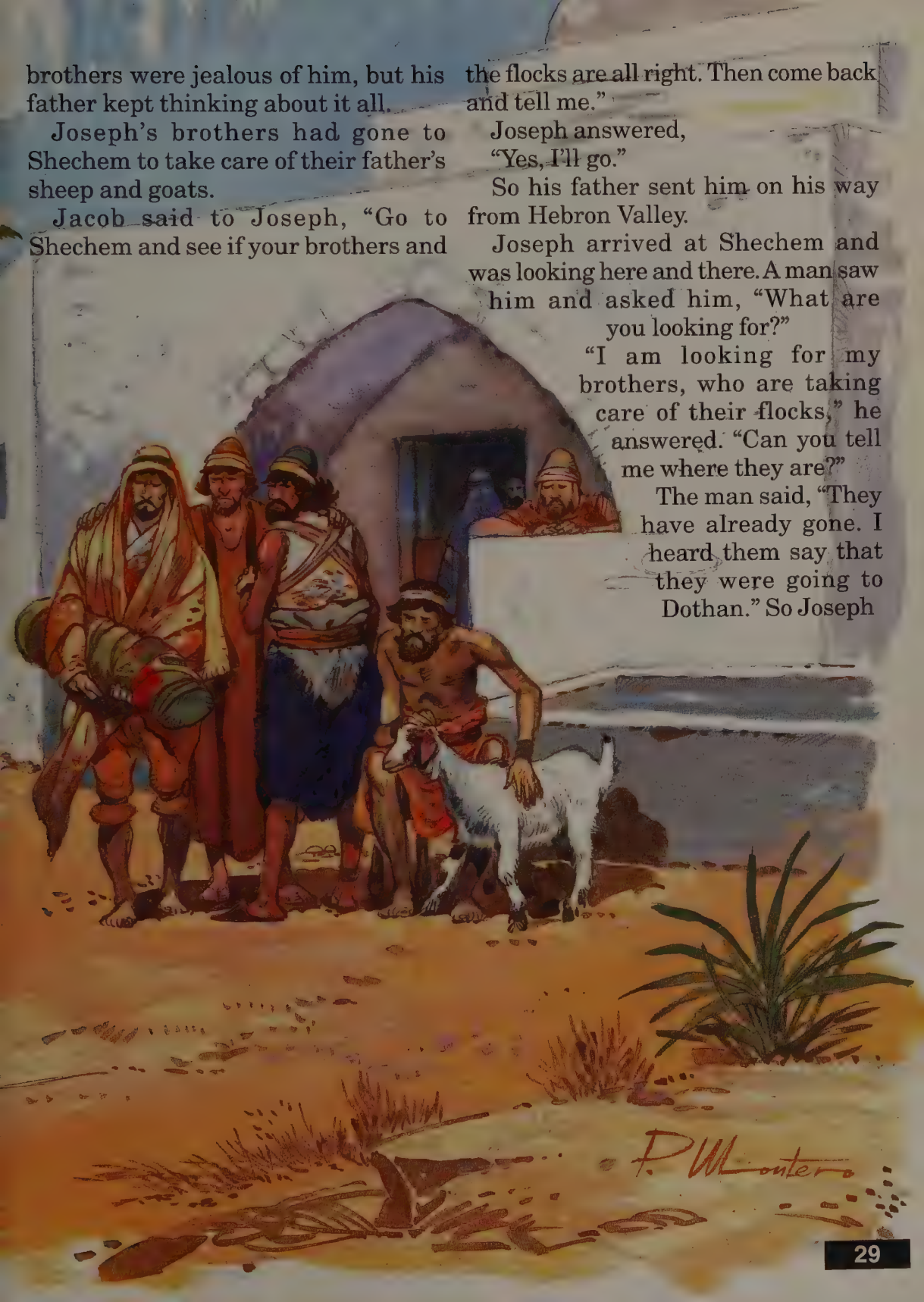
Joseph answered, "Yes, I'll go."

So his father sent him on his way from Hebron Valley.

Joseph arrived at Shechem and was looking here and there. A man saw him and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

"I am looking for my brothers, who are taking care of their flocks," he answered. "Can you tell me where they are?"

The man said, "They have already gone. I heard them say that they were going to Dothan." So Joseph



went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

When they saw him far away, they planned to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes that dreamer. Come, let's kill him and throw his body into a dry well. We'll tell everyone that a wild animal killed him. Then we'll see what happens to his dreams."

Reuben heard them and tried to save Joseph. "Let's not kill him," he said. "Just throw him into this well here, but don't hurt him." He said this, wanting to save him and send him back to his father. When Joseph came to his brothers, they tore off his special robe. Then they threw him into the dry well.

While they were eating, they suddenly saw a group of Ishmaelite traders on their way to Egypt. Their camels were carrying spices and precious ointments. Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain by killing our brother and then telling a lie about him? Let's sell him to these traders. Then we won't have to hurt him. After all, he is our own brother." His brothers agreed. When the traders came by, the brothers pulled Joseph out of the well and sold him for 20 silver coins. The traders took him to Egypt.

At this time, Reuben was not there. When he came back to the well and found Joseph missing, he was very sad. He returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not there! What am I going to do?"

Then they killed a goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood. They took the robe to their father and said, "We found this. Does it belong to your son?"

Jacob knew it was Joseph's robe and said, "Yes, it is his! Some wild animal has killed him. My son Joseph has been torn to pieces!" Jacob was in deep sorrow for a very long time. All his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he would not listen. He said, "I will keep mourning for my son until the day I die."

Joseph in Egypt

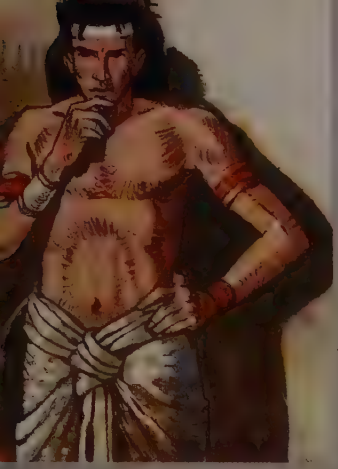
Genesis 41.14-46

Many things happened to Joseph in Egypt. The LORD was with him and he became successful. But he was blamed for something he did not do and put in prison for a time. He helped many people while in prison. God's spirit helped Joseph to explain dreams. The king of Egypt had a dream and sent for Joseph.

Joseph was immediately brought out of prison. He came before the king, shaved and clean. The king said to Joseph, "I had a dream. No one can explain it. I hear that you understand dreams."

Joseph answered, "Your Majesty, it is God who helps me to understand!"

The king said, "I dreamt that I was standing on the bank of the River Nile. Suddenly seven fat cows came up out of the river and were eating the grass. Then seven thin cows came up. They were the most bony cows I have ever seen. The thin cows ate up the fat ones. But still they looked just as thin as before. Then I woke up. Later I had another dream: I saw seven heads of grain growing on one stalk. They were full and ripe. Then seven thin and dry heads ofgrain came up. They swallowed the full ones. I told the dreams to the wise men. But none of them could explain them to me."



Joseph said to the king, "The two dreams mean the same thing. God has told you what he is going to do. The seven fat cows and the seven full heads of grain are seven years of plenty. The seven thin cows and the seven thin heads of grain are seven years of famine. There will be seven years of rich harvests all over Egypt. After that, there will be seven years of famine. People will forget all the good years, because the famine will be terrible. It will ruin the country. You saw the same thing twice. It is planned by God. He will make it happen soon.

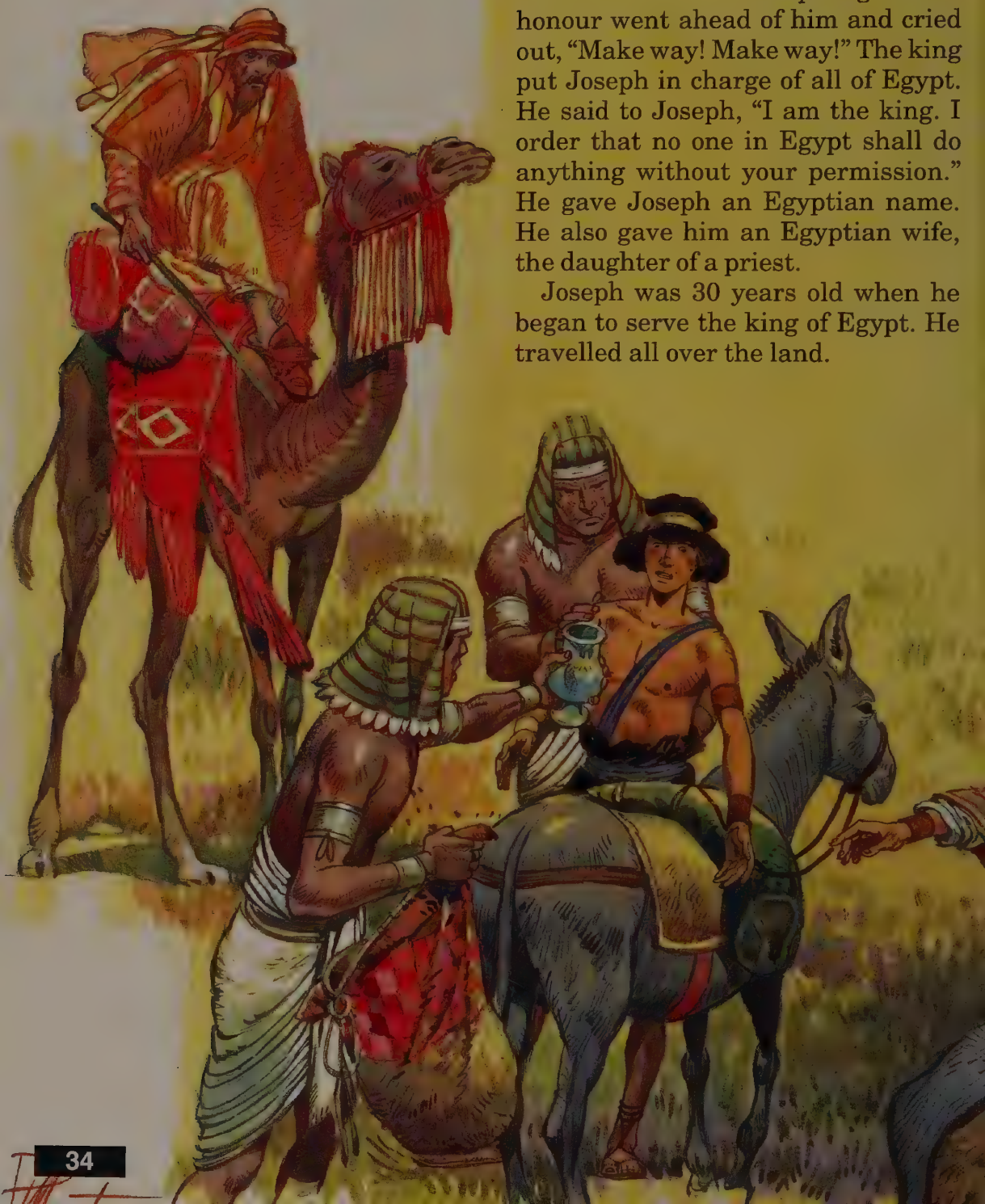
"Your Majesty must find a wise and able man and put him in charge of the country. You must also appoint other officers. They should collect a fifth of the grain during the seven years of plenty. Let them store up the grain in the cities and keep it safe. The food will be enough for the country during the seven years of famine. In this way the people will not starve."

The king and his officers agreed to this plan. He said to them, "We will never find a better man than Joseph. He has God's spirit in him." The king said to Joseph, "God has shown you all this. It is clear that you are wiser than anyone else. I will put you in charge of my country. All my people will obey your orders. You will be second only to me. I now appoint you governor over all Egypt."

The king then put his own ring with the royal seal on Joseph's finger.

He also put a fine linen robe on him. He placed a gold chain around his neck. He gave him the second royal chariot to ride in. Joesph's guard of honour went ahead of him and cried out, "Make way! Make way!" The king put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt. He said to Joseph, "I am the king. I order that no one in Egypt shall do anything without your permission." He gave Joseph an Egyptian name. He also gave him an Egyptian wife, the daughter of a priest.

Joseph was 30 years old when he began to serve the king of Egypt. He travelled all over the land.



Joseph surprise his brothers

Genesis 43.29-34

Joseph's plans were followed. When the seven years of famine came, Egypt was well prepared with plenty of grain.

Because of the famine, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food. But they did not know that the man in charge was Joseph. Joseph pretended they were spies. But Joseph really loved his brothers. They told Joseph about their father and how they had left their youngest brother at home.

When they left, Joseph secretly put their money back into their sacks. He told them that they could not buy any food next time, unless they brought their youngest brother, Benjamin. Joseph was very keen to see his own younger brother.

Jacob's sons refused to go to Egypt for more food without Benjamin. At last things were so bad that Jacob let Benjamin go to Egypt, even though he was afraid he would never see him again.

When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, he said, "So this is your youngest brother, the one you told me about. God bless you, my son." But Joseph left quickly, because he was about to cry. He went to his room and cried. Then he washed his face and came out. Without showing his feelings, he ordered the meal to be served. Joseph was served at one table and his brothers at another. The brothers were seated at a table in front of Joseph, in the order of their age. This was a real surprise to them! Food was served to them from Joseph's table. Benjamin was served much more than the rest of them. They ate and drank as much as they could.

The missing cup

Genesis 44.1-34

Joseph ordered the chief servant, "Fill the men's sacks with as much grain as they can carry. Put each man's money on top of the grain. Put my silver cup in the top of the youngest brother's sack, together with the money for his grain." The servant did as he was told. Early in the morning the brothers went on their way with their

donkeys. They had only gone a short distance from the city. Joseph said to his chief servant, "Hurry after those men. When you catch up with them, ask them, 'Why have you done wrong to me when I was so good to you? Why did you steal my master's silver cup? He uses it not only for drinking, but also for telling the future."

When the servant caught up with them, he repeated Joseph's words. They answered him, "What do you mean, sir, by talking like this? Believe us, we have done no such thing. You know that we brought back the money we found on top of our sacks. Why then should we steal silver or gold from your master's house? Sir, if the cup is found with any one of us, let him be put to death. The rest of us will become your slaves."

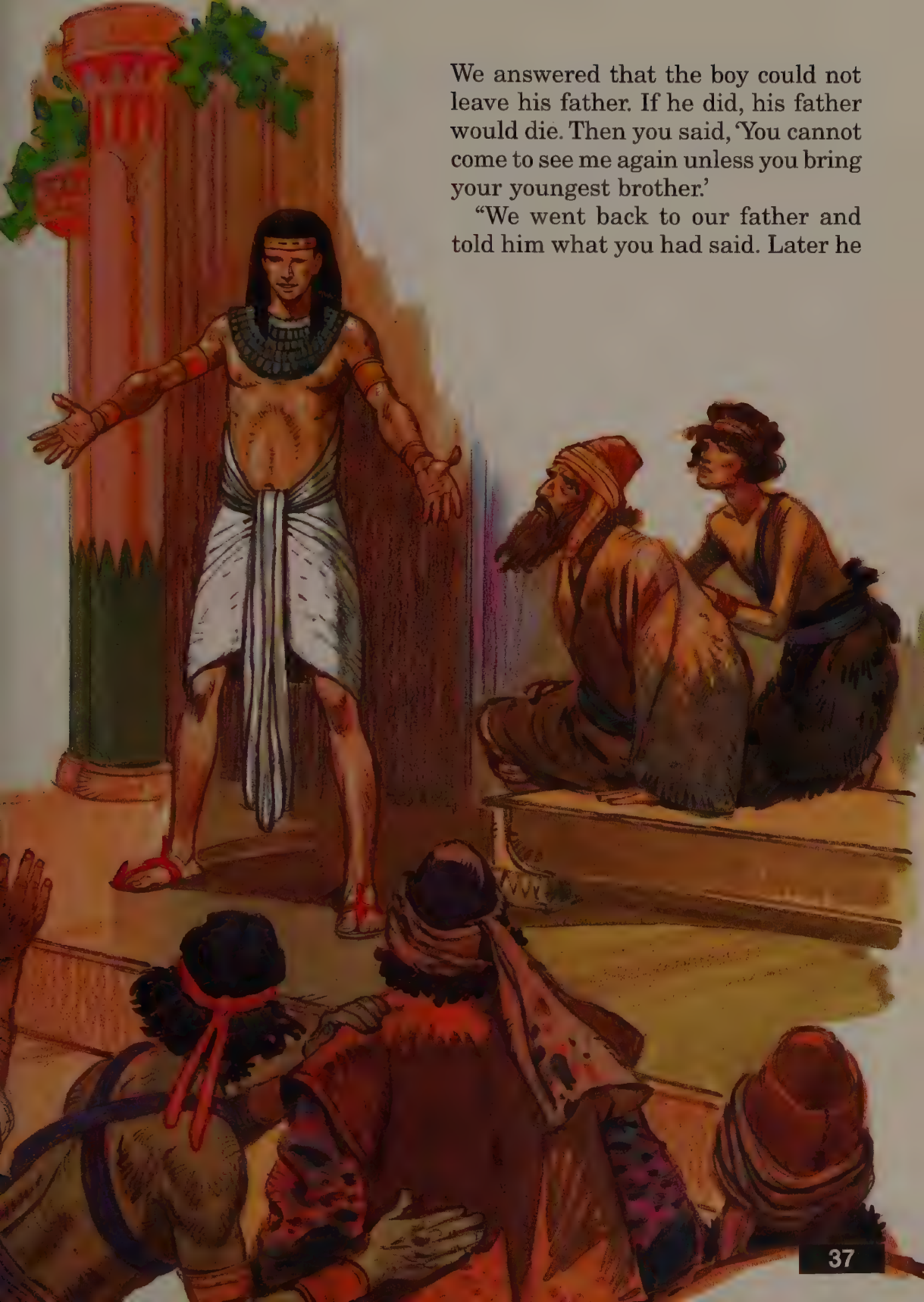
The servant said, "All right, but only the one who has stolen the cup will become my slave. The rest of you can go free." So they quickly lifted down their sacks. Each man opened his sack. Joseph's servant searched carefully, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. At last, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers were shocked! They loaded their donkeys again and returned to the city.

When they came to Joseph's house, they bowed down before him. Joseph said, "What have you done? Didn't you know that I have my way of finding out?"

"What can we say to you, sir?" Judah answered. "How can we explain this? Through this God has shown us our sin. All of us are now your slaves, not just the one who was found with the cup."

Joseph said, "Oh, no! I would never do that! Only the one who had the cup will be my slave. The rest of you are free to go back to your father."

Judah went up to Joseph and said, "Please, sir, let me speak to you. Don't be angry with me. You are like the king himself. Sir, you asked us, "Do you have a father or another brother"? We answered, 'we have a father who is old, and a younger brother, born to him in his old age. The boy's brother is dead. His father is so fond of him". Sir, you told us to bring him here, so that you could see him.



We answered that the boy could not leave his father. If he did, his father would die. Then you said, 'You cannot come to see me again unless you bring your youngest brother.'

"We went back to our father and told him what you had said. Later he

told us to return and buy more food. We answered, 'We cannot go. We will not be allowed to see the governor, unless our youngest brother is with us'. Our father told us, 'You know that I had only two sons born to my wife Rachel. I have already lost one. He must have been torn to pieces by wild animals. If something happens to this one, I will die of sorrow in my old age'.

"And now, sir," Judah continued, "if I go back to my father without the boy, he will die. He is so old and loves the boy so much. He will die of sorrow. What is more, I told my father that if I did not bring the boy back to him, I would bear the blame all my life. So now, sir, I will stay here as your slave in place of the boy. Let him go back with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I cannot bear to see my father die of sorrow."

Joseph tells his brothers who he is

Genesis 45.1-20,25-28;46.5-6

Joseph was no longer able to keep back his tears. His servants saw him crying. So he sent them out of the room. Then Joseph told his brothers who he was. He cried so loudly that the Egyptians heard him. The news was also taken to the king's palace. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But when his brothers heard this, they were very frightened. They could not speak. Then Joseph said to them, "Please come closer." They did! He said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me. It was really God who sent me here to Egypt to save people's lives. This is only the second year of the famine. There will be five more years with no harvests. God sent me here to save you and your children in this wonderful way. So it was not really you

who sent me here, but God! He has made me the king's highest official. I am the governor of this whole country.

"Now hurry back to my father and tell him what his son Joseph says, 'God has made me governor of all Egypt. Come to me quickly. You can live in Goshen, where you can be near me. Bring your children, your grandchildren, your sheep, your goats, your cattle, and everything else that you have. I can take care of you. There will be five more years of famine. I do not want my own people and their animals to starve."

Joseph continued, "Now all of you, and you too, Benjamin, can see that I am really Joseph. Tell my father of my great position here in Egypt. Tell him about everything that you have seen. Hurry, and bring him here."

He threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and began to cry. Benjamin also cried as he hugged him. Then, still weeping, Joseph hugged each of his brothers and kissed them. After that his brothers began to talk with him.

When the news reached the palace that Joseph's brothers had come, the king and his officers were pleased. The king said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers to load their animals and return to the land of Canaan. Let them bring their father and their families back here. I will give them the best land in Egypt."

So they left Egypt and went back home to their father Jacob in Canaan. They told him, "Joseph is still alive! He is the ruler of all Egypt!" Jacob was so surprised! He could not believe them!

But they told him all that Joseph had said to them. When he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to take him to Egypt, he knew this wonderful news must be true. "My son Joseph is still alive!" he said. "This is all I could ask for! I must go and see him before I die."

So Jacob set out for Egypt with his whole family. His sons put him, their small children, and their wives in the carts. They took their flocks and everything they had with them.

The great escape

Today we do not know what it is like to be a slave and to lose all freedom. Egypt was a very powerful country. Jacob, known as Israel, had died. The Egyptians made his descendants their slaves. They became known as the twelve tribes of Israel. The "Israelites" were also called "Hebrews".

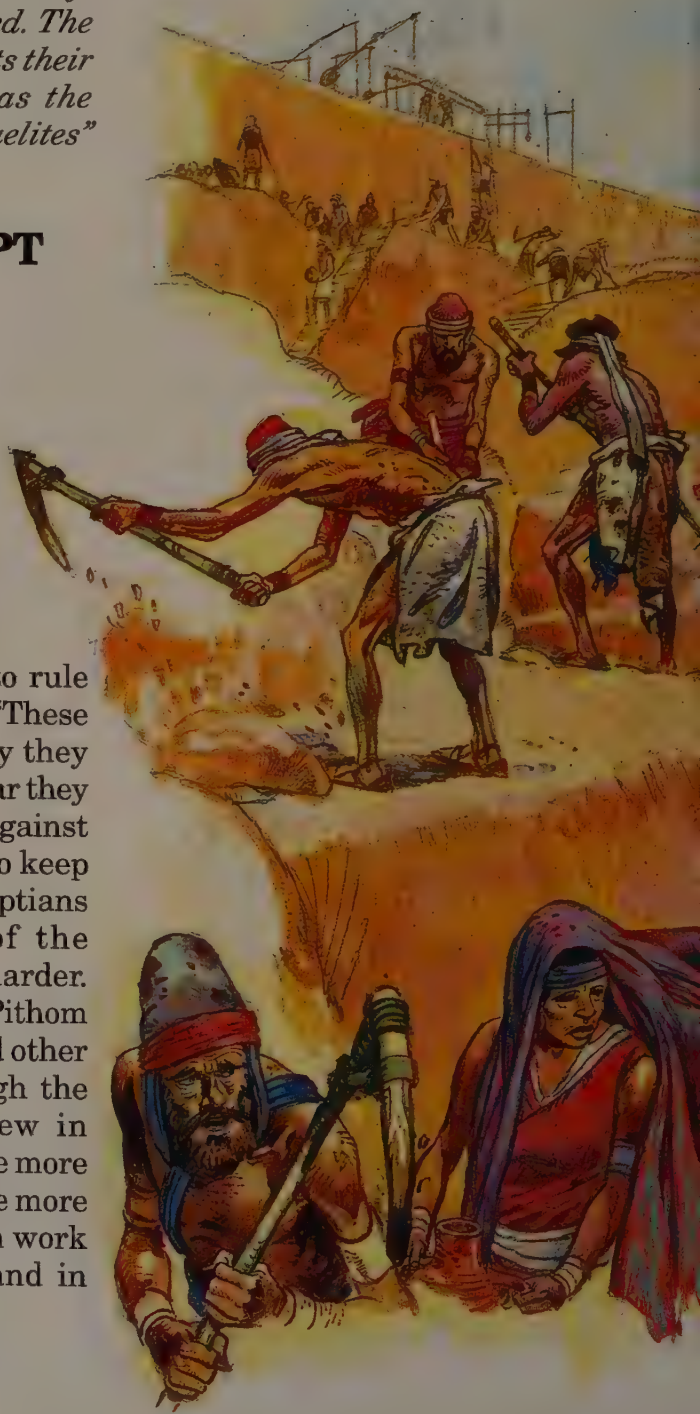
SLAVERY IN EGYPT

Cruel treatment

Exodus 1.6-14

As the years went by Joseph, his brothers, and the rest of their family died. But their descendants, the Israelites, had many children and grew in number.

Then a new king, who knew nothing about Joseph, began to rule in Egypt. He said to his people, "These Hebrews are too many. One day they may give us trouble. In case of war they might join our enemies to fight against us and defeat us. We must try to keep their number small." So the Egyptians put cruel men in charge of the Israelites to make them work harder. The Israelites built the cities of Pithom and Rameses to store wheat and other grain for the king. Even though the Israelites suffered, they grew in numbers. The Egyptians became more afraid of them. They also became more cruel to them. They made them work as slaves on their buildings and in their fields.



Baby boys are murdered

Exodus 1.15-22

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the two nurses who helped the Hebrew women. "When you help the Hebrew women give birth," he said to them, "kill the baby if it is a boy. If it is a girl, let it live." But the nurses feared God. So they did not obey the king. Instead, they let the boys live.

So God was good to these nurses. He gave them families of their own. The Israelites continued to increase and became strong. Finally the king gave a command to all his people, "Take every newborn Hebrew boy and throw him into the River Nile. But let all the girls live."

THE GREAT LEADER

A baby in a basket

Exodus 2.1-10

Moses became one of the most important people in the history of Israel. But he nearly died when he was a baby.

During this time, a man from the tribe of Levi married a woman from his own tribe. A son was born to them. When the mother saw what a fine baby he was, she hid him for three months. She could not hide him any longer. So she took a basket made of reeds and covered it with tar to make it watertight. She put the baby in it. Then she placed it in the tall grass at the edge of the river. The baby's sister stood nearby to see what would happen to him.

The king's daughter came down to the river to bathe. Her maids walked along the side. Suddenly she saw the basket in the tall grass and sent a maid to get it. The princess opened it and found a baby boy! He was crying. She felt sorry for him. "This is a Hebrew baby," she said.

Then his sister came up and asked her, "Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to look after the baby for you?"

"Please do," she answered. So the girl went and brought the baby's own mother. The princess told the woman, "Take this baby and look after him for me. I will pay you." So she took the baby and looked after him. When the child was old enough, she took him to the princess, who kept him as her own son. She said, "I name him Moses, because I pulled him out of that water."

Moses escapes

Exodus 2.11-24

Moses was brought up as an Egyptian. When he tried to help his own people, the Hebrews, things went wrong.

When Moses grew up, he used to visit his people, the Hebrews. He saw how they were forced to do hard work. One day he saw an Egyptian kill a Hebrew. Moses looked all around and made sure that no one was watching. He killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. The next day he went back and saw two Hebrew men fighting. He said to the man who did the wrong, "Why are you hitting one of our own people?"

The man answered, "Who made you our ruler and judge? Are you going to kill me just as you killed that Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid

and thought, "People have found out what I have done!" When the king heard the story, he wanted to have Moses killed.

But Moses ran away to the land of Midian. There he sat by a well. Then seven daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian, came to get water for their father's flocks. But some shepherds drove them away. Then Moses helped the girls by getting water for their animals. When they returned to their father, he asked, "Why have you come back so early today?"

They answered, "An Egyptian helped us. When the shepherds troubled us, he got water for us and our flocks."

"Where is he?" he asked. "Why did you leave him there? Go and invite him to eat with us."

Moses agreed to live with the family. He married Jethro's daughter Zipporah. A son was born to them and they named him Gershom.

Years later, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were still suffering as slaves. They cried out to God for help. God heard their cry and felt sorry for them. He remembered his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God calls Moses

Exodus 3.1-17;4.10-15

God can do things without help, but he often uses people. God used Moses in a very special way. This is the story of how God used Moses.

The Egyptians believed in many gods with different names. Because of this Moses wanted to know God's name.

One day Moses was taking care of his father-in-law's flocks. He led the animals across the desert and came to Sinai, the holy mountain. There the angel of God appeared to him as a flame coming from the middle of a bush. The bush was on fire but it was not burning up. "This is strange," Moses thought. "Why isn't the bush burning up? I will go near and see."

When God saw Moses coming closer, he called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

He answered, "Yes, here I am."

God said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Then God said, "I have seen how cruel the Egyptians are to my people. I have heard their cry for help. I know all about their sufferings. So I have come down to save them and to bring them out of Egypt. I will take them to a large country where the land is good and fertile. It is the land of the Canaanites and many other peoples. Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt. I want you to lead my people out of his country."

But Moses said to God, "How can I go to the king? Who am I to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

God answered, "I will be with you. When you bring my people out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain. Then they will know that I have sent you." But Moses replied, "When I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of our ancestors has sent me to you, they will ask me, What is his name? So what can I tell them?"

God said, "I am who I am. You must tell them, the one who is called I AM has sent me to you. Tell them that I, the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have sent you. This is my name for ever. By this name, my people will know me. Go and call the leaders of Israel together and tell them that I, the LORD, the God of their ancestors, appeared to you. Tell them that I have come to them. I have seen what the Egyptians are doing to them. I will bring them out from the cruel people in Egypt. I will take them

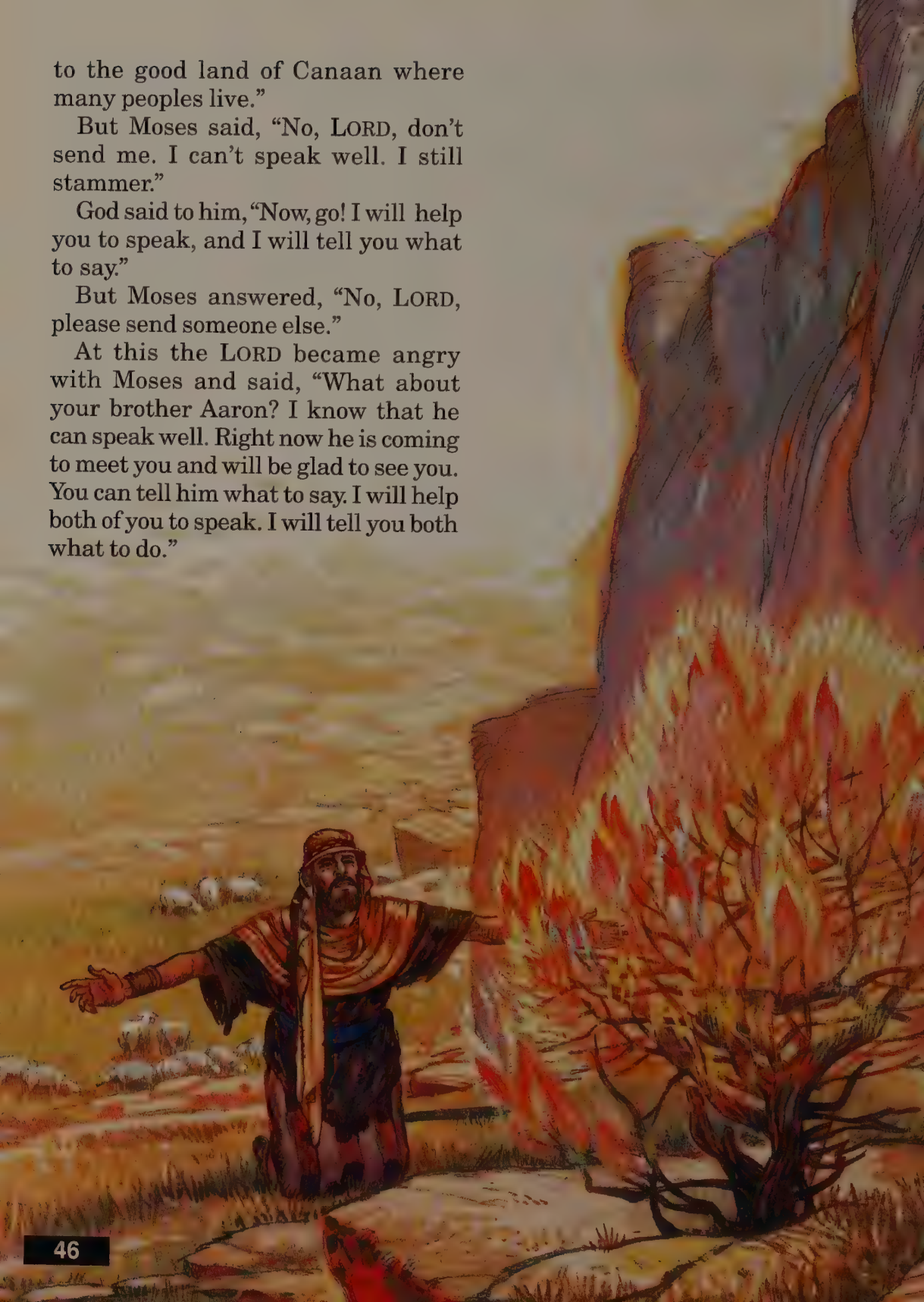
to the good land of Canaan where many peoples live."

But Moses said, "No, LORD, don't send me. I can't speak well. I still stammer."

God said to him, "Now, go! I will help you to speak, and I will tell you what to say."

But Moses answered, "No, LORD, please send someone else."

At this the LORD became angry with Moses and said, "What about your brother Aaron? I know that he can speak well. Right now he is coming to meet you and will be glad to see you. You can tell him what to say. I will help both of you to speak. I will tell you both what to do."



Moses meets the king of Egypt

Exodus 5.1-9,19,22; 6.1

Moses went to Aaron, his brother. Together they met the Israelites and told them what God had said.

Moses and Aaron went to the king of Egypt and said, "The LORD, the God of Israel says, Let my people go to hold a festival for me in the desert."

"Who is the LORD?" the king asked. "Why should I listen to him and let them go? I do not know the LORD. I will not let them go."

Moses and Aaron replied, "The God of our people has spoken to us. Allow us to travel three days into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God. If we don't do so, he will kill us with disease or by war."

The king said to them, "What do you mean by making the people stop their work? Get those slaves back to work! You people are too many, and now you want to stop working!"

That same day the king commanded the cruel Egyptian officers and the Israelite supervisors, "Stop giving the people straw for making bricks. Let them go and find it for themselves. But still they must make the same number of bricks as before, not one brick less. They don't have enough work to do. That is why they keep asking me to let them go and offer sacrifices to their God! Keep them busy and make them work harder. Then they won't have time to listen to these lies."

The Israelite supervisors knew they were in for trouble. How could they make the same number of bricks every day without a supply of straw?

Moses turned to the LORD, saying, "Why do you let your people suffer like this?"

The LORD replied to Moses, "Soon you are going to see what I will do to the king. I will force him to drive my people out of his land."

GOD'S VICTORY OVER EGYPT

The king of Egypt was very stubborn. God knew he would have to change the king's mind if the Israelites were to go free.

God brought many disasters upon the Egyptians and their king.

These terrible events were called "plagues". There were ten of them! During the plagues the king promised four times he would set the Israelites free. He asked Moses to pray to God to stop the plagues. Each time he changed his mind and refused to let them go.

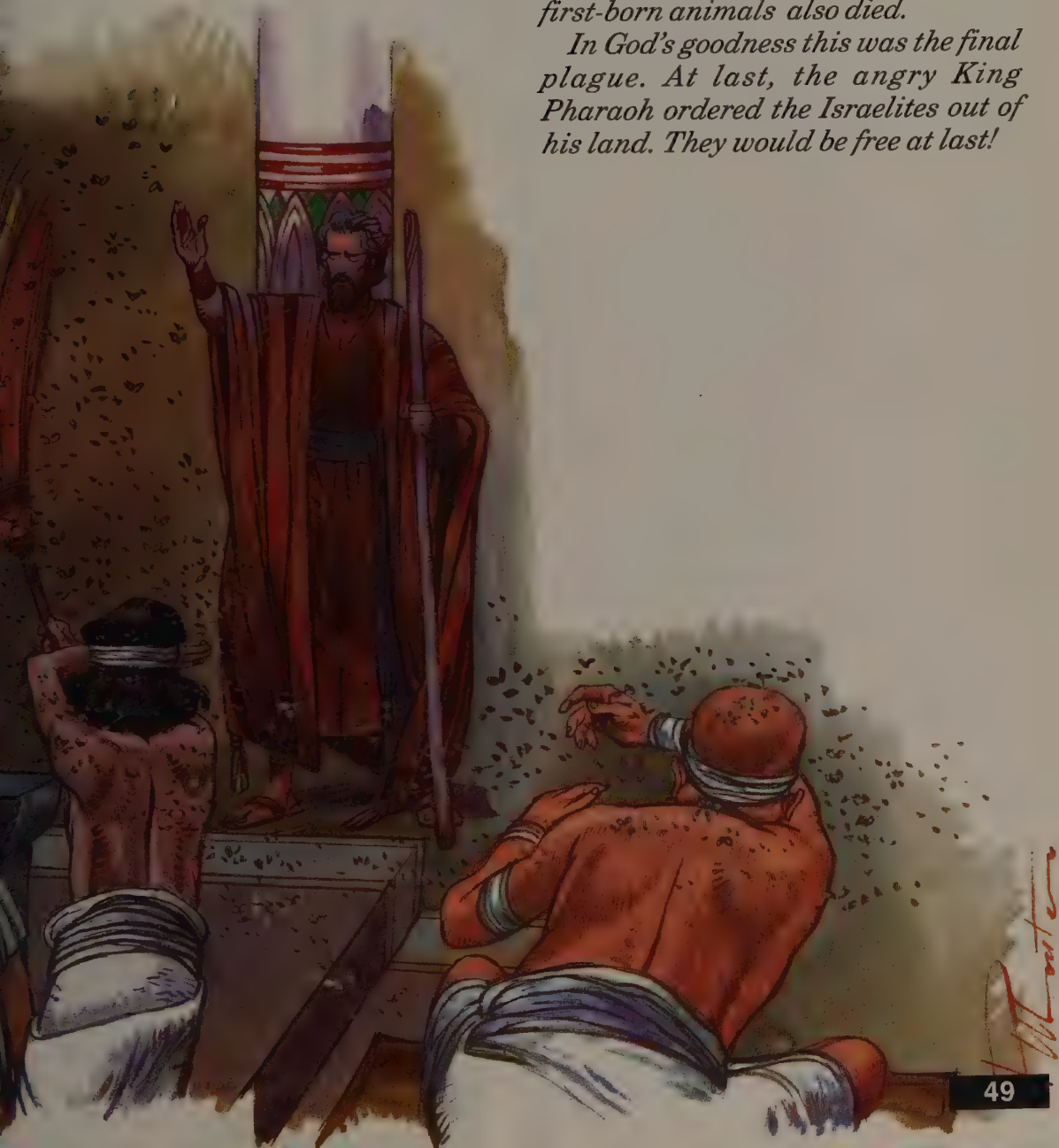
The water of the River Nile changed to blood, so all the fish died! Then the land was covered with frogs. The palace, the kitchens, the bedrooms, and every place was full of them. They jumped all over everybody. After they died they stank. Then came horrible insects. They bothered everybody. Next came millions of flies. In a wonderful way God protected the Israelites in Goshen.

A disease struck the Egyptians' animals and they died. Later painful boils broke out on the people's bodies. Even with all these happenings the king refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

Then God sent thunder and hail. It was the worst storm ever to hit Egypt. After that a strong wind brought great numbers of huge grasshoppers, called "locusts". They ate up all the plants and crops that were left after the hailstorm. Nothing green was left in the whole land of Egypt.

The ninth plague was thick darkness for three days! But there was light in Goshen for God's people. By this time God had to bring about something even more severe. At midnight the eldest son in each Egyptian family suddenly died. Even the king's eldest son died! There was loud crying in every house as sons were dead. The first-born animals also died.

In God's goodness this was the final plague. At last, the angry King Pharaoh ordered the Israelites out of his land. They would be free at last!



The first Passover

Exodus 12.1-14

During the final plague when the eldest son in each Egyptian family died, the plague "passed over" the Israelite families. This event became known as the "Passover". Even today the descendants of the Israelites celebrate the Passover every year. In this way they remember what God did for their ancestors.

Many years later, at the "Last Supper" Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples.

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the people of Israel: On the tenth day of this month each man must choose a lamb or a young goat for his family to eat. If his family is too small, he and his neighbour may share it. It must be a very young and perfect male animal. Then, on the evening of the 14th day of the month, all the people of Israel must kill the animals. The people are to take some of the blood and put it on their doorposts and at the top of the doors. That night you must eat roasted meat with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. Do not eat raw or boiled meat, but only roasted. You must not leave any of it until morning. If any is left over, it must be burnt. You are to eat quickly. You must be dressed for travel, with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. It is the Passover Festival to honour me, the LORD.

"On that night I will go through the land of Egypt. I will kill every first-born male, both human and animal. I will punish all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood on the doorposts will be a sign to mark the houses in which you live. I will see the blood and pass over you. I will not harm you when I punish the Egyptians. You must always celebrate this day as a religious festival. Let it remind you of what I, the LORD, have done for you."

The Israelites leave Egypt

Exodus 12.37-42

Now the Israelites were ready to leave. They had to leave quickly and they needed food. So they took bread dough made without yeast. It could be cooked quickly because it did not need time to rise and was called "unleavened" bread. Even today, unleavened bread is used by the Israelites in the Passover celebration. It reminds them that their ancestors left Egypt in a hurry.

Over one million Israelites set out on foot from Egypt. Many other people as well as their sheep, goats, and cattle went with them. They had to leave Egypt very suddenly. They did not have time to get their food ready. So they made unleavened bread from the flour they had brought out of Egypt.

The Israelites had lived in Egypt for 430 years. On the very day the 430 years ended, all the LORD's people left Egypt. That night the LORD watched over them and brought them out of Egypt. This event is celebrated every year in honour of the LORD.

Crossing the Red Sea

Exodus 14.5-31

So the journey to their new home began. Even today nobody really knows how this amazing event happened. For the Israelites it was a clear sign that God was with them.

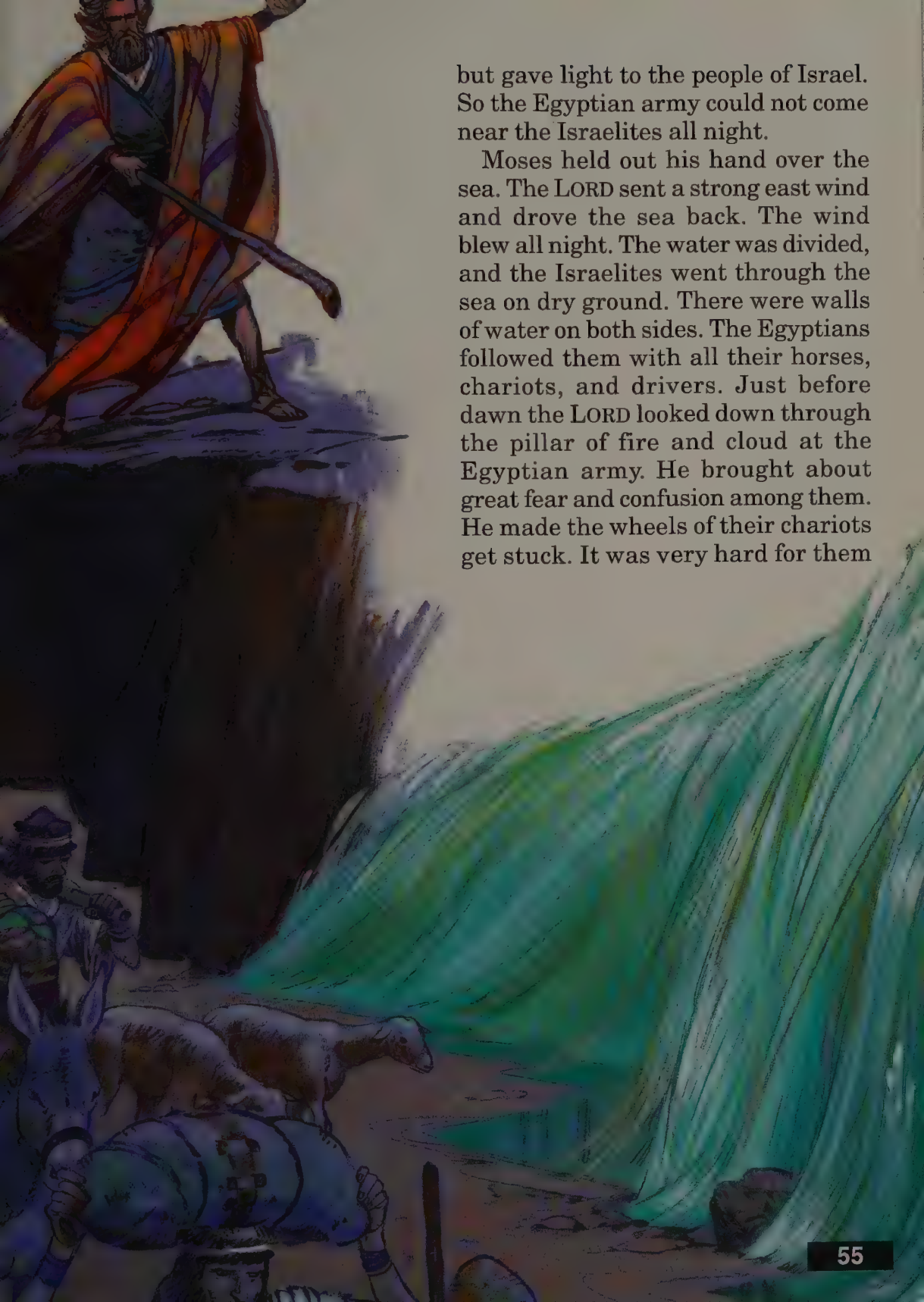
The king of Egypt came to know that the people had escaped. He and his officials changed their minds and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites escape. We have lost our slaves!" Then the king got his war chariot and his army ready. They all set out with their chariots. The best 600 were led by his officers. The LORD made the king so angry that he decided to go after the Israelites, who had left Egypt so happily. The Egyptian army, with all the horses, chariots, and drivers, followed them. They caught up with the Israelites by the Red Sea where they were camping.

When the Israelites saw the king and his army marching against them, they were frightened. They cried out to the LORD for help. They said to Moses, "Were there no graves in Egypt? Did you have to bring us out here in the desert to die? Look what you have done by bringing us out of Egypt! We told you before we left that this would happen. We told you to leave us alone and let us live as slaves of the Egyptians. It would be better to be slaves there than to die here in the desert."

Moses answered, "Don't be afraid! Be calm! Then you will see what the LORD will do to save you today. You will never see these Egyptians again. The LORD will fight for you. All you have to do is to be calm."

The LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out for help? Tell the people to move forward. Lift up your stick and hold it over the sea. The water will divide. The Israelites will be able to walk through the sea on dry ground. I will make the cruel Egyptians go in after them. When I defeat them, they will know that I am the LORD. Then they will honour me."

Now the angel of God moved from the front of the people of Israel and went behind them. A pillar of cloud also moved until it was between the Egyptians and the Israelites. The cloud made it dark for the Egyptians,



but gave light to the people of Israel. So the Egyptian army could not come near the Israelites all night.

Moses held out his hand over the sea. The LORD sent a strong east wind and drove the sea back. The wind blew all night. The water was divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground. There were walls of water on both sides. The Egyptians followed them with all their horses, chariots, and drivers. Just before dawn the LORD looked down through the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army. He brought about great fear and confusion among them. He made the wheels of their chariots get stuck. It was very hard for them

to move. The Egyptians said, "The LORD is fighting for the Hebrews against us. Let's get out of here!"

The LORD said to Moses, "Hold out your hand over the sea, and the water will come back over the Egyptians." So Moses held out his hand over the sea. At daybreak the water returned to where it was before. The Egyptians tried to escape from the water, but the LORD threw them into the sea. The water came back and covered the Egyptian army. Not one of them was left.

In this way the LORD saved the people of Israel from the Egyptians. The Israelites saw them lying dead on the seashore. When they saw the LORD's great power in destroying the Egyptians, they praised and thanked him. They had faith in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

The song of victory

Exodus 15.1-3

Here is part of the song that Moses sang to celebrate the Israelites' escape from the Egyptians.

"I will sing to the LORD, for he has won a great victory.
He has thrown the horses and their riders into the sea.
The LORD is by my side to protect me and save me.
He is my God, and I will praise him.
I will sing about the greatness of my fathers' God.
The LORD is a warrior. His name is so wonderful!"

THE LONG JOURNEY

For a long time the Israelites had wanted to be free. But they were not ready to face the problems of the journey. The area they had to cross was mostly desert. It took them a long time to reach the land which God had promised them.

Food in the desert

Exodus 16.2-3,9-16

Quails are birds which fly over the desert. We are not sure what the "thin and flaky" substance was. In fact the Israelites called it "manna", which sounds like the Hebrew words for "What is it?" It was like a small white

seed and was very tasty. The Israelites thanked God that it kept them alive.

In the desert, the people complained to Moses and Aaron. They said, "We have no food. We are starving. We wish that the LORD had killed us in Egypt. There we could enjoy meat and other food as much as we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to die!"

Moses said to Aaron, "Tell the people to come and stand before the LORD. He has heard their complaints." As Aaron spoke to them, they turned toward the desert. Suddenly the dazzling light of the LORD appeared in a cloud. The LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the

complaints of the Israelites. Tell them that by sunset they will have meat to eat. In the morning they will have all the bread they want. Then they will know that I, the LORD, am their God."

In the evening, a large flock of quails came and covered the area where the people were camping. In the morning there was dew all around the camp. When the dew was gone, there was something thin and flaky on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they wondered what it was.

Moses said to them, "This is the food that the LORD has given you to eat. The LORD has commanded that everybody must gather as much of it as he needs. Take enough for everyone in each family."

Water in the desert

Exodus 17.1-6

All the Israelites left the desert of Sin. They moved from one place to another at the command of the LORD. When they camped at Rephidim, there was no water for them to drink. They complained to Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses answered, "Why are you grumbling? Why are you doubting the LORD's power?"

But the people were very thirsty and continued to complain. They said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? We and our children and our animals are dying!"

Moses called out to the LORD and said, "What can I do with these people? They are going to stone me!"

The LORD said to Moses, "Walk ahead of the people with some of the leaders. Take the stick with which you struck the River Nile. I will stand before you on a rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." Moses did so in the presence of the leaders.

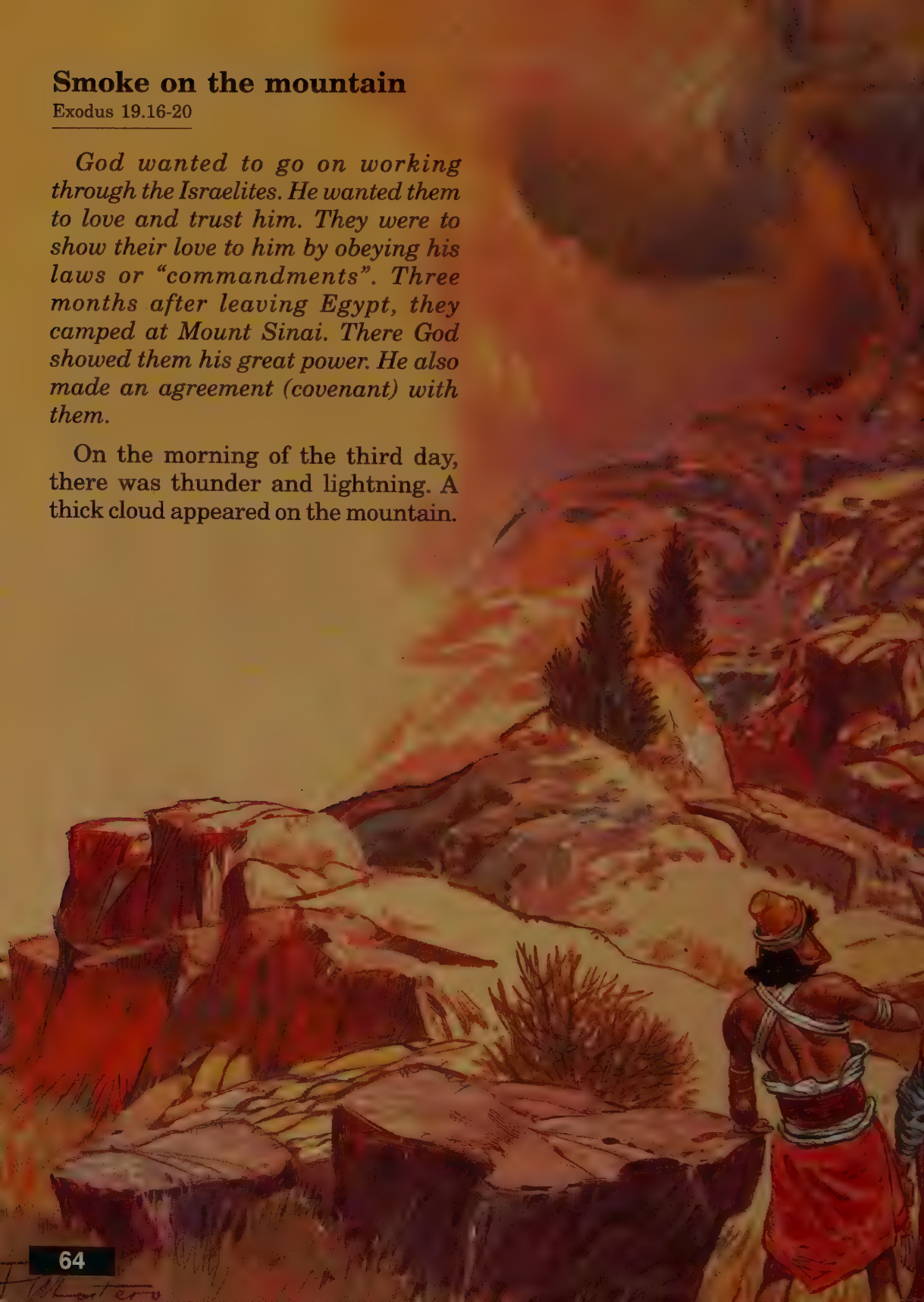
The water came out and the people drank it.

Smoke on the mountain

Exodus 19.16-20

God wanted to go on working through the Israelites. He wanted them to love and trust him. They were to show their love to him by obeying his laws or "commandments". Three months after leaving Egypt, they camped at Mount Sinai. There God showed them his great power. He also made an agreement (covenant) with them.

On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning. A thick cloud appeared on the mountain.



A very loud trumpet blast was heard, and all the people in the camp shook with fear. Moses led them out of the camp to meet God. They stood at the foot of the mountain. They saw thick smoke all over Mount Sinai. The LORD had come down to the mountain in fire. The smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace. Again the people were very frightened. The sound of the trumpet became louder and louder. Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses. Moses went up to meet the LORD.

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20.1-17

God gave Ten Commandments which the Israelites had to keep. In return, he promised that they would be his special people. He would give them a land to live in. He would protect them from their enemies.

God spoke these words: "I am the LORD your God. I brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.

"Worship no other gods but me.

"Do not make any idols. Do not make idols that look like things in the sky or on the earth or in the water. Do not worship any idol, because I am the LORD your God. I do not want you to worship any other god. I will punish many generations of those who hate me. But I will love those who love me and obey my laws.

"Do not misuse my name. I, the LORD your God, will punish anyone who uses my name in a wrong way.

"Keep the Sabbath day holy. You have six days in which to do your work. The seventh day is a day of rest to honour the LORD your God. On that day no one is to work. Neither you, your children, your servants, your animals, nor the foreigners who live among you. In six days I, the LORD, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them. On the seventh day I rested. So I have blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

"**Respect your father and mother.** Then you will live long in the land I am giving you.

"Do not kill anyone.

"Do not be immoral.

"Do not steal.

"Do not witness falsely against anyone.

"Do not desire anyone's things. Do not desire his house, his wife, his servants, his animals, or anything else that he owns."

The golden calf

Exodus 32.1-20

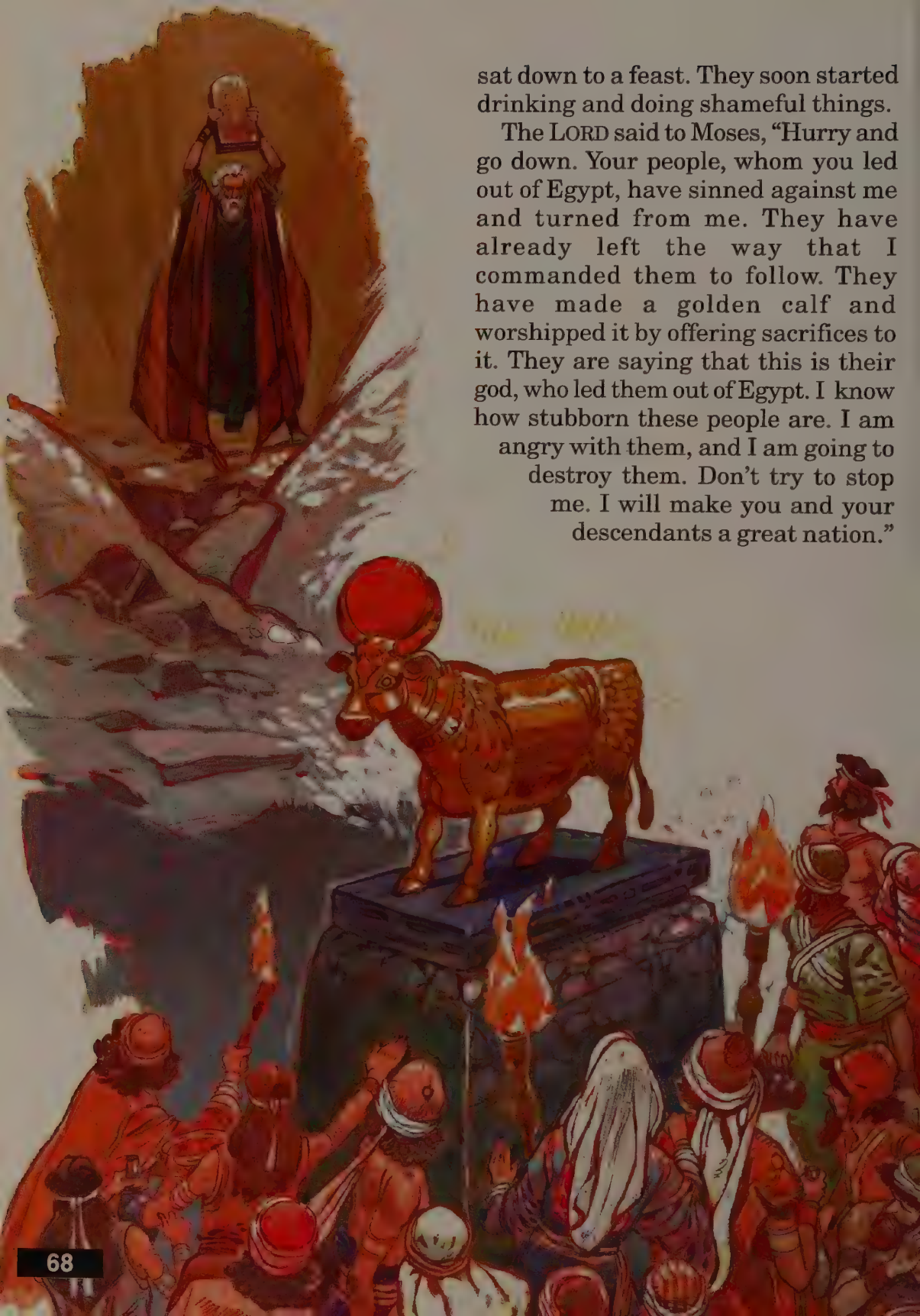
Before long, the Israelites broke the first commandment. It is often hard to worship God who cannot be seen. The Israelites had to learn to do this.

The people saw that Moses stayed on the mountain for a long time. They all went to Aaron and said, "We do not know what has happened to Moses, the man who led us out of Egypt. So make us a god to lead us."

Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold earrings which your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing. Bring them to me." So the people took off their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. He melted the earrings. He poured the gold into a mould, and made a golden calf.

The people said, "This is our god, who led ~~us~~ out of Egypt!"

Then Aaron built an altar in front of the golden calf. He said, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to honour the LORD." Early the next morning they brought some animals to be offered as sacrifices and some to eat. The people



sat down to a feast. They soon started drinking and doing shameful things.

The LORD said to Moses, "Hurry and go down. Your people, whom you led out of Egypt, have sinned against me and turned from me. They have already left the way that I commanded them to follow. They have made a golden calf and worshipped it by offering sacrifices to it. They are saying that this is their god, who led them out of Egypt. I know how stubborn these people are. I am angry with them, and I am going to destroy them. Don't try to stop me. I will make you and your descendants a great nation."

But Moses pleaded with the LORD God and said, "LORD, why should you be so angry with your people? You brought them out of Egypt with great power! Why should the Egyptians be able to say, He led his people out because he wanted to destroy them in the mountains? Stop being angry. Change your mind and do not destroy your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember the special promise you made to them to give them many descendants. You had also promised a land for your people for ever."So the LORD changed his mind and did not destroy his people.

Moses came down the mountain. He carried two stone slabs with the commandments written on both sides. God himself had made them and had written the commandments on them.

Joshua, Moses' helper, heard the people shouting and said to Moses, "I hear the sound of fighting in the camp!"

Moses said, "That's no sound of battle! There are no shouts of joy or cries of sorrow. It's the sound of singing."

Moses came closer to the camp. He saw the people dancing before the golden calf. He became very angry. There, at the foot of the mountain, he threw down the stone slabs and broke them. He took the golden calf which they had made. He melted it, ground it into fine powder, and mixed it with water. Then he made the people of Israel drink it.

The death of Aaron

Numbers 20.22-29

After the Israelites had left Kadesh and had gone as far as Mount Hor on the Edomite border, the LORD said, "Aaron, this is where you will die. You and Moses disobeyed me at Meribah, and so you will not enter the land I promised the Israelites. Moses, go with Aaron and his son Eleazar to the top of the mountain. Then take Aaron's priestly robe from him and place it on Eleazar. Aaron will die there."

Moses obeyed, and everyone watched as he and Aaron and Eleazar walked to the top of Mount Hor. Moses then took the priestly robe from Aaron and placed it on Eleazer. Aaron died there.

When Moses and Eleazar came down, the people knew that Aaron had died, and they mourned his death for thirty days.

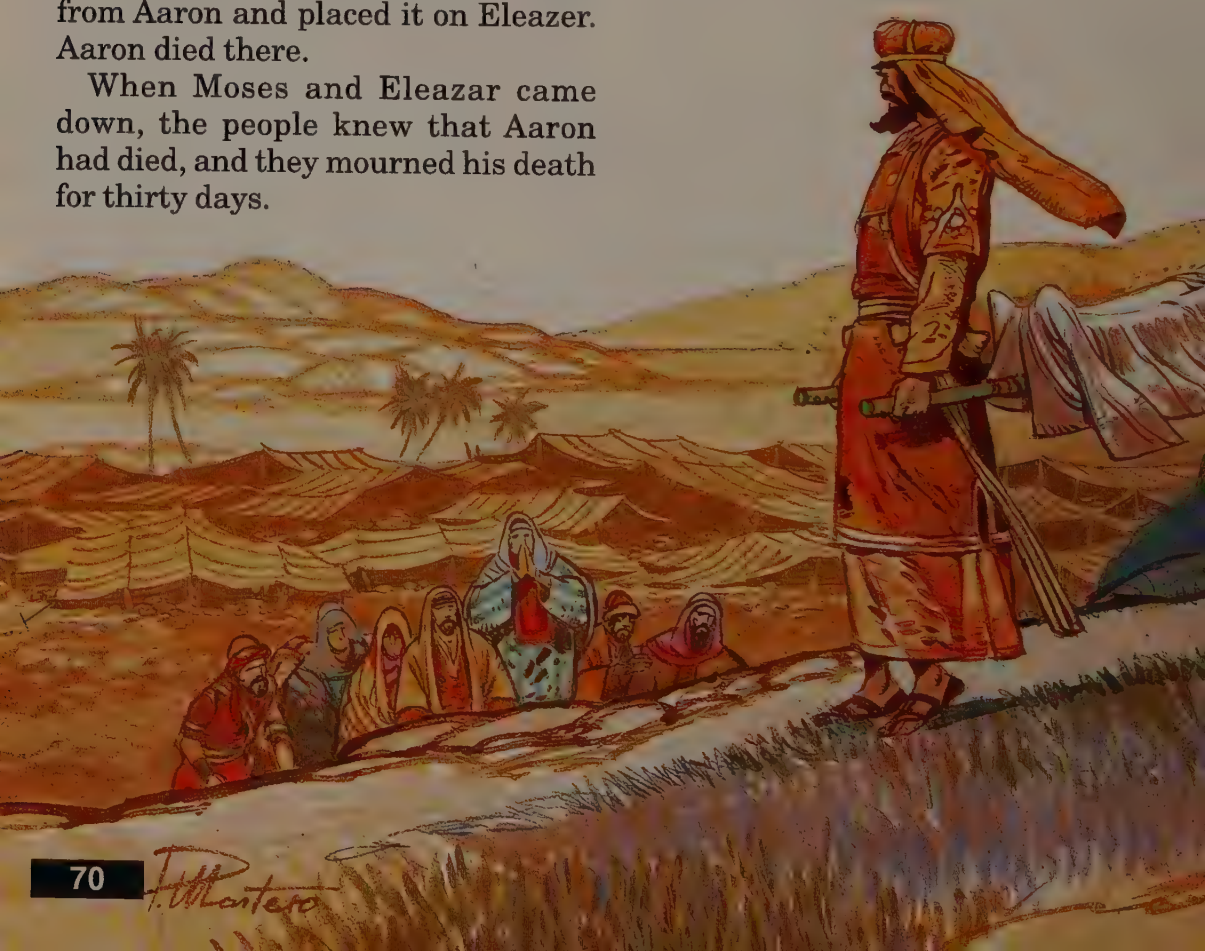
The death of Moses

Deuteronomy 34.1-12

Moses led the Israelites until they reached the edge of the land God had promised them.

By this time he was an old man. God allowed him to see the Promised Land before he died. But he was not allowed to enter the land, because he did not do all that God had told him to do.

Moses went up to Mount Nebo, to the top of Mount Pisgah, east of Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land, from one end to the other. Then the LORD said to Moses, "This is the country that I promised to give to the descendants of Abraham,



Isaac, and Jacob. I have let you see it, but I will not let you go there."

So Moses, the LORD's servant, died there in the land of Moab, as the LORD had said he would. The LORD buried him in a valley in Moab. But to this day no one knows the exact place of his burial. Moses was 120 years old when he died. He was as strong as ever, and his eyesight was still good. The Israelites mourned for him for 30 days.

Moses had appointed Joshua, the son of Nun, to be the next leader of the people. He was filled with wisdom. The people of Israel obeyed Joshua. They kept the commands that the LORD had given them through Moses.

There has never been a man of God in Israel like Moses. The LORD spoke with him face to face. The LORD made him do many wonderful things to the king of Egypt and to his people. No other man of God ever has been able to show the Israelites such great and wonderful things.

People of Courage

When Moses died, the Israelites were at the border of the Promised Land. At first they could only live in some parts of the land. Gradually they came to own more and more of it. Again and again they were attacked by other tribes who did not want them to stay. The stories in this chapter are about men who trusted God and were very brave. They led the Israelites in times of danger and difficulty. God gave them victory because of their faith, even when the enemy seemed much stronger.

JOSHUA, A NEW LEADER

Joshua is told to be confident

Joshua 1.1-9

It was Joshua who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Once again, God told Joshua how important it was to keep the Law.

After the death of his servant Moses, the LORD spoke to Moses' helper, Joshua, "My servant Moses is dead. Get ready now, you and all the people of Israel. Cross the Jordan River into the land that I am giving you. As I promised Moses, I have given you and all my people the whole land that you will walk on. Joshua, no one will ever be able to defeat you. I

will always be with you as I was with Moses. I will never leave you. Be strong in mind and be bold. You will be the leader of my people. They will take over this land which I promised their ancestors. You must obey the whole Law that my servant Moses gave you. Do not leave out any part of it. Then you will do well wherever you go. You must read the book of the Law when you worship the LORD. Study it day and night and obey everything written in it. Then you will do well. Do not be afraid or feel sad. I, the LORD your God, am with you wherever you go. I repeat what I told you before: Be strong in mind and be bold!"

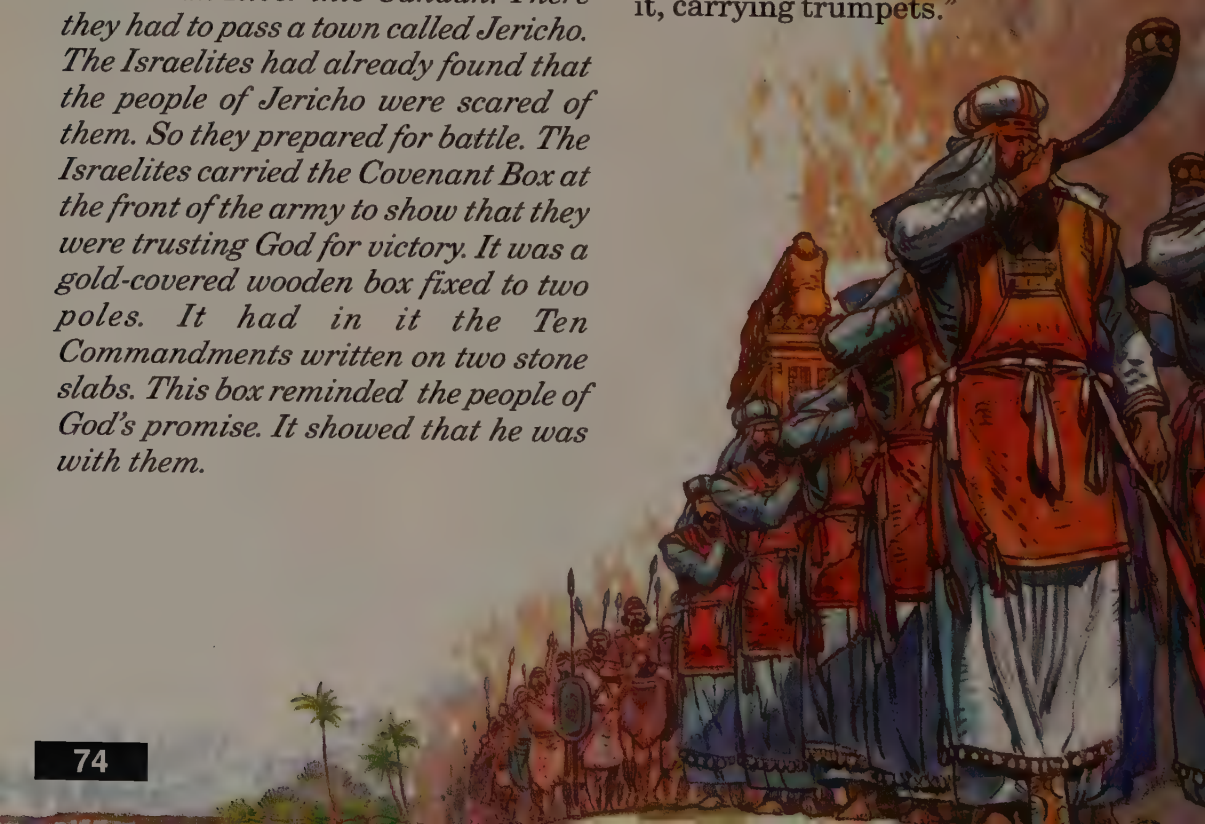
The fall of Jericho

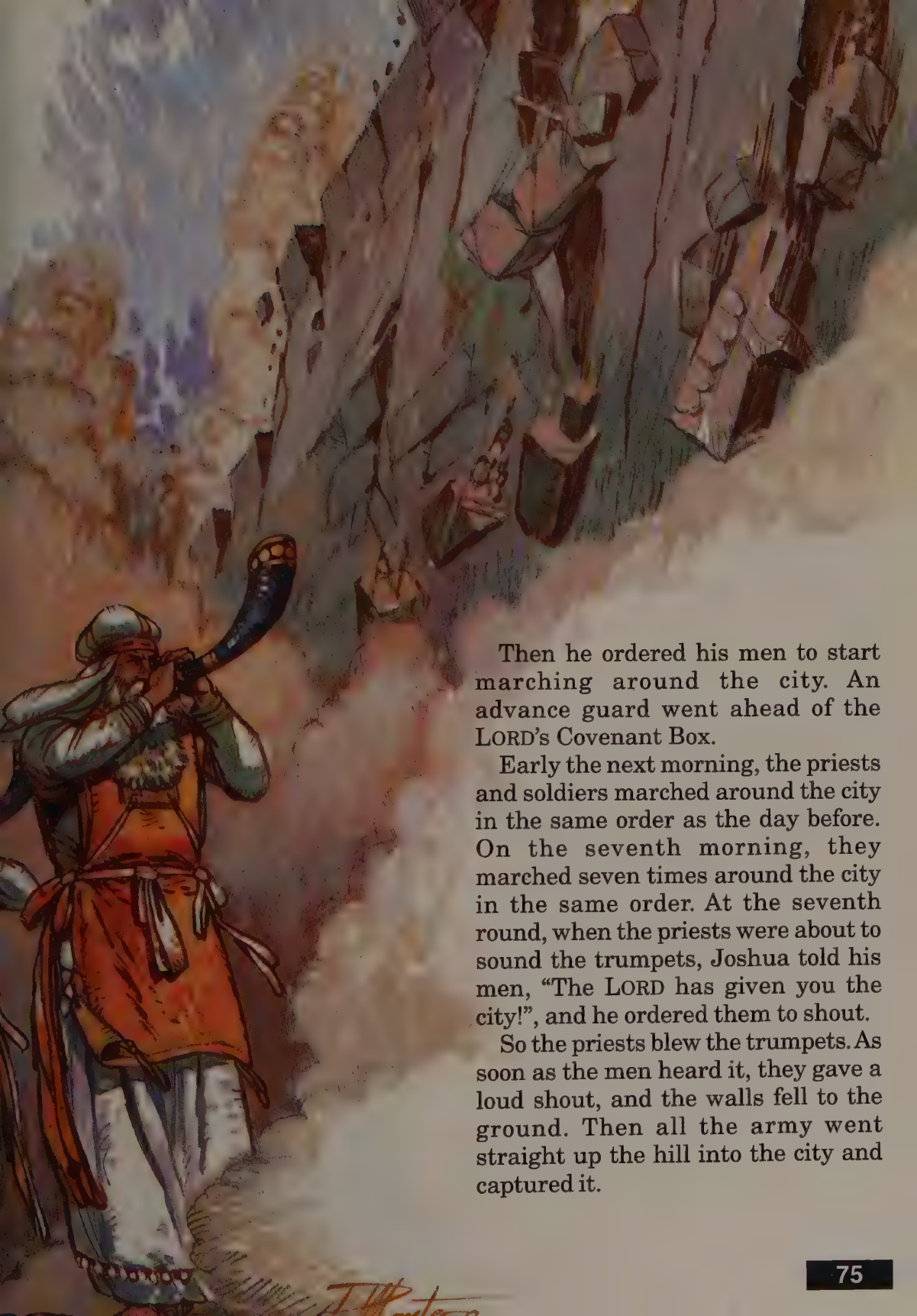
Joshua 6.1-7,12-13,15-16,20

Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan River into Canaan. There they had to pass a town called Jericho. The Israelites had already found that the people of Jericho were scared of them. So they prepared for battle. The Israelites carried the Covenant Box at the front of the army to show that they were trusting God for victory. It was a gold-covered wooden box fixed to two poles. It had in it the Ten Commandments written on two stone slabs. This box reminded the people of God's promise. It showed that he was with them.

The gates of Jericho were kept shut and guarded to keep the Israelites out. No one could enter or leave the city. The LORD said to Joshua, "I am going to give you Jericho, with its king and all its brave soldiers. You and your soldiers must march around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests, each carrying a trumpet, must go in front of the Covenant Box as you march. On the seventh day you and your soldiers must march around the city seven times while the priests blow the trumpets. Finally, the priests will play a long note. As soon as you hear it, all the men will give a loud shout, and the city walls will fall. Your whole army can then go straight into the city."

So Joshua called the priests and told them, "Take the Covenant Box, and seven of you go in front of it, carrying trumpets."





Then he ordered his men to start marching around the city. An advance guard went ahead of the LORD's Covenant Box.

Early the next morning, the priests and soldiers marched around the city in the same order as the day before. On the seventh morning, they marched seven times around the city in the same order. At the seventh round, when the priests were about to sound the trumpets, Joshua told his men, "The LORD has given you the city!", and he ordered them to shout.

So the priests blew the trumpets. As soon as the men heard it, they gave a loud shout, and the walls fell to the ground. Then all the army went straight up the hill into the city and captured it.

Joshua, the great leader

Joshua 24.1,14-24

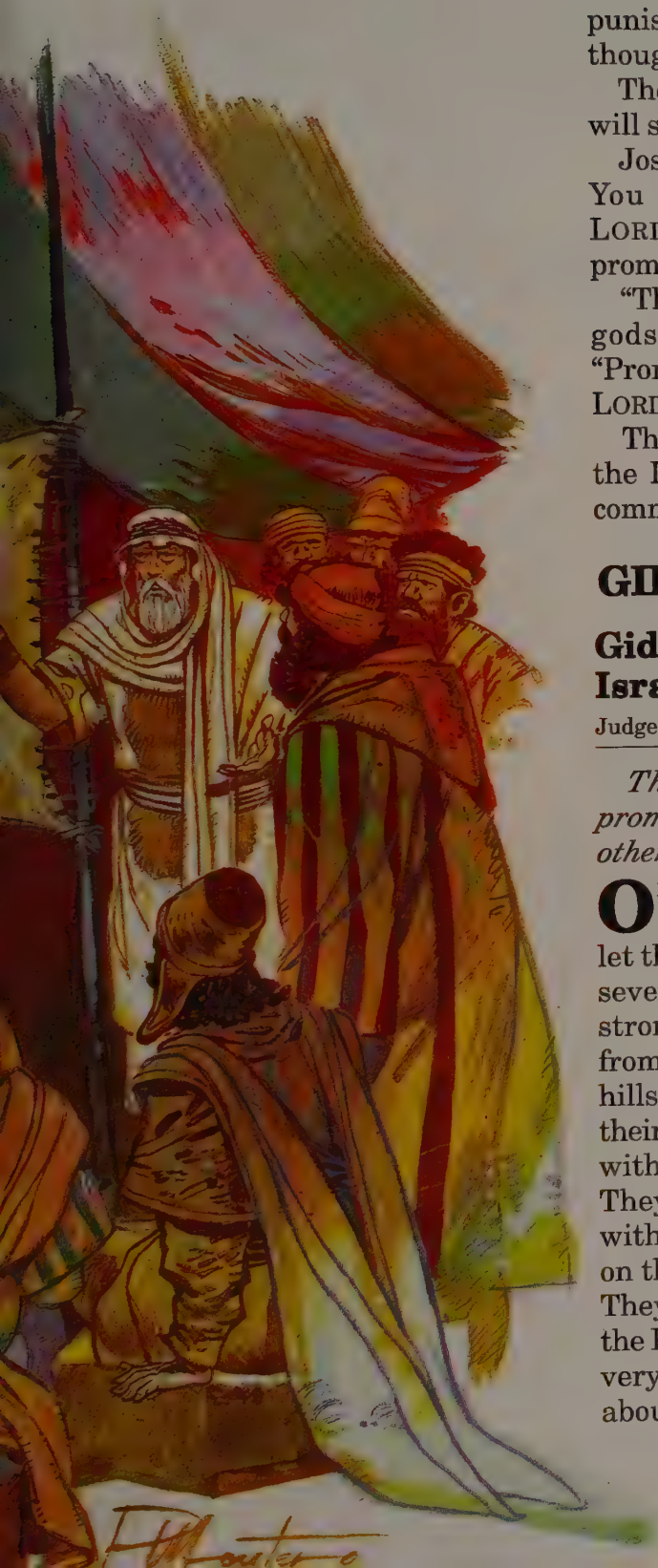
News spread that Jericho had fallen before the small Israelite army. The tribes around became very frightened. With Joshua as their leader, the Israelites had many victories. At the end of his life, Joshua gave a strong challenge to the people to keep the agreement with God.

Joshua got all the people of Israel together at Shechem. There he spoke to them, "Worship the LORD and obey him in everything. Have nothing to do with the gods which your ancestors worshipped in Mesopotamia and in Egypt. Obey only the LORD.

"If you are not willing to worship and obey him, choose your god today from the gods of your ancestors or the gods of the Amorites of this land. But my family and I will worship and obey the LORD and him alone."

The people replied, "We would never leave the LORD to serve other gods! The LORD our God set our fathers and us free when we were slaves in Egypt. We saw the wonderful things he did for us. He kept us safe all the way as we passed through many countries. As we came into this land, the LORD drove out all the Amorites who lived here. So we also will serve the LORD. He is our God."

Joshua said to the people, "But you may not be able to serve the LORD, the holy God. He will not forgive your sins if you worship any other god. If you leave him, he will turn against you and



punish you. He will destroy you, even though he was good to you before."

The people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."

Joshua told them, "It is your choice. You have promised to serve the LORD." "Yes," they said, "we have promised."

"Then remove the images of other gods that you have," he ordered. "Promise that you will not leave the LORD, the God of Israel."

The people replied, "We will worship the LORD our God. We will obey his commands."

GIDEON, A BRAVE MAN

Gideon is called to save Israel

Judges 6.1-16

The Israelites soon forgot their promises. They went back to worship other gods after Joshua's death.

Once again the people of Israel sinned against the LORD. So he let the people of Midian rule them for seven years. The Midianites were so strong that the people of Israel hid from them in caves and holes in the hills. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites would come with other people and attack them. They would come in large numbers with their animals. They would camp on the land and destroy all the crops. They would take away all the flocks of the Israelites. So the Israelites became very poor. But they could do nothing about it.

Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help against the Midianites. A man of God brought them this message from the LORD, the God of Israel, "I brought you out when you were slaves in Egypt. I saved you from the Egyptians and from the people who fought you here in this land. I drove them out and gave you their land. I told you that I am the LORD your God. You should not worship the gods of the Amorites of this land. But you have not listened to me."

One day the LORD's angel came to the village of Ophrah. He sat under the oak tree that belonged to Joash. Gideon, the son of Joash, was threshing some wheat in a wine press. This was a place where the Midianites would not see him. The angel appeared to him there and said, "You are a brave and strong man. The LORD is with you!"

Gideon said to him, "If I may ask, sir, why has all this happened to us if the LORD is with us? What happened to all the wonderful things that the LORD used to do? Our fathers told us how he brought them out of Egypt. Why has the LORD left us to be troubled by the Midianites?"

Then the LORD said, "You are a strong man. I am sending you to save the people of Israel from the Midianites."

Gideon replied, "But LORD, how can I save them? My clan is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh. I am not so important in my family."

The LORD answered, "You can do it with my help! You will easily defeat the Midianites."

Gideon is not afraid to die

Judges 6.25-32

That night the LORD told Gideon, "Take your father's bull and another seven-year-old bull. Destroy the altar of Baal, and the idol of the goddess Asherah that your father has made. Build an altar to the LORD your God there. Then take the second bull and burn it whole as an offering, Use the image of Asherah for firewood." Gideon did what the LORD had told him to do.

He went out with ten of his servants. But he was very afraid of his family and the people in the town. So he did it secretly at night.

Early the next morning, the people found the altar and the idol broken down. The people asked each other, "Who did this?" They found out that Gideon son of Joash had done it. Then they came to Joash and said, "Bring your son out here. We want to kill him! He has destroyed the altar to Baal and the idol of Asherah."

But Joash said to them, "Are you speaking for Baal and trying to protect him? Anyone who speaks for him will be killed before morning. If Baal is a god, let him fight for himself. He did not do anything when his altar was destroyed!"

Victory with 300 men

Judges 7.1-22

One day Gideon and all his men got up early and camped beside Harod Spring. The Midianites were camping in the valley below Moreh Hill in the north.

The LORD said to Gideon, "I do not need all these men to defeat the Midianites. They might think that they had won the battle without my help. Tell the people, Anyone who is afraid should go home. The others will stay here with me at Mount Gilead." So twenty-two thousand went back, but ten thousand stayed.

Then the LORD said to Gideon, "You still have too many men. Take them down to the water. There I will tell you who should go with you and who should not." Gideon took the men down to the water. The LORD told him, "Take everyone who laps up the water with his tongue like a dog. Don't take anyone who gets down on his knees to drink." Only 300 men took water in their hands and lapped it. All the others got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, "I will help you to defeat the Midianites using the 300 men who lapped up the water. Tell everyone else to go home."

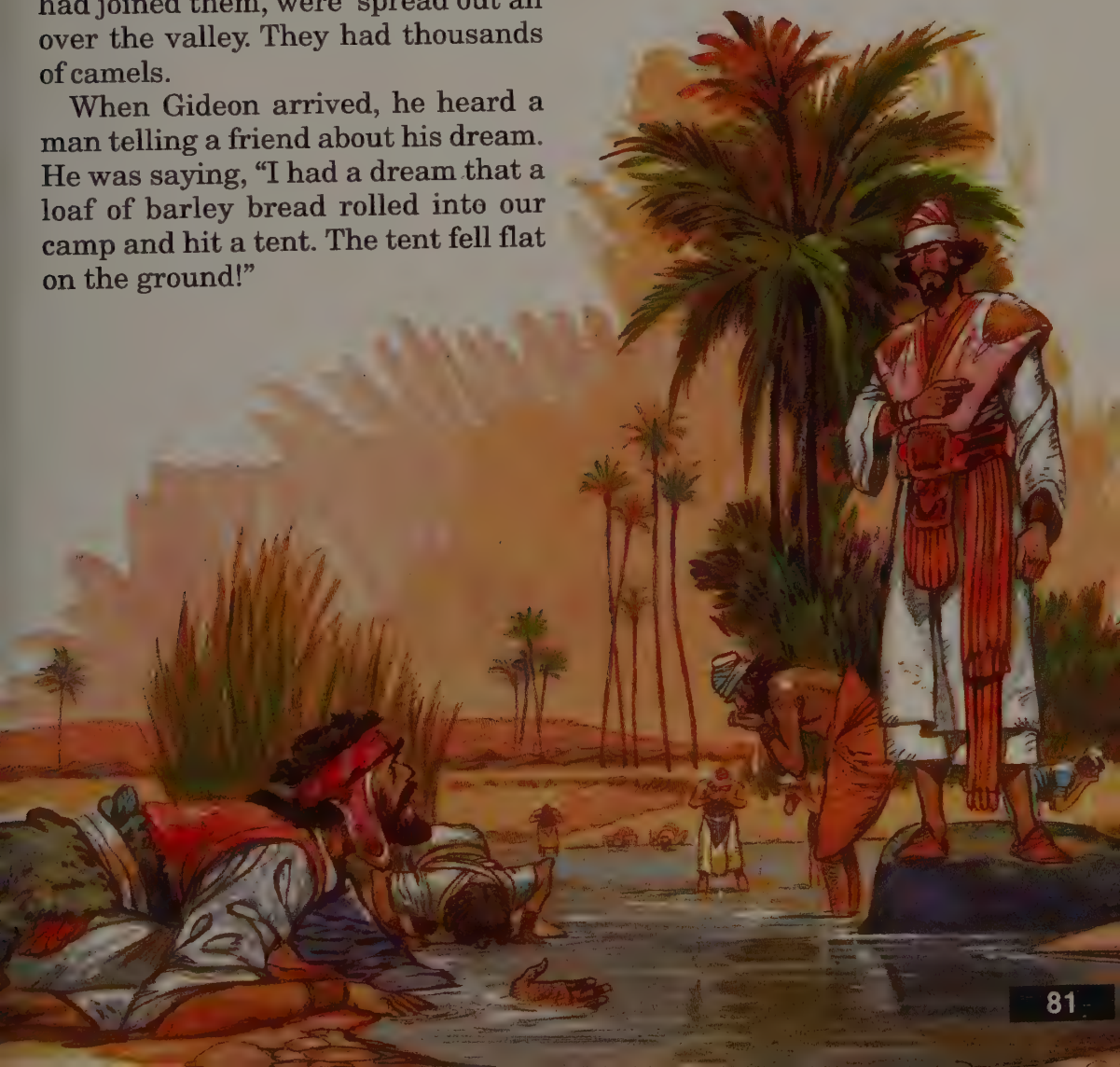
So Gideon sent all the Israelites home, except the 300. They kept all the supplies and trumpets.

That night the LORD told Gideon, "Get up and attack the enemy camp. I will defeat them for you. But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the enemy camp with your servant Purah. Listen to what they are saying. Then you will have the courage to attack." So Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the edge of the enemy camp. The Midianites and the other people who had joined them, were spread out all over the valley. They had thousands of camels.

When Gideon arrived, he heard a man telling a friend about his dream. He was saying, "I had a dream that a loaf of barley bread rolled into our camp and hit a tent. The tent fell flat on the ground!"

His friend replied, "The loaf means Gideon. Your dream tells us that his God will help him to defeat us!"

When Gideon heard this he bowed down to worship the LORD. Then he went back to the Israelite camp and said, "Get up! The LORD is giving you victory over the Midianites!" He divided his 300 men into three groups



and gave each man a trumpet and a pot with a flaming torch inside it. He told them, "When I get to the edge of the camp, watch me, and do what I do. My group and I will blow our trumpets. Then you blow yours all around the camp and shout, 'Victory for the LORD and Gideon!' " At about midnight, the Midianites changed their guards.

Then Gideon and his 100 men came to the edge of the enemy camp. They blew the trumpets and broke the pots they were holding. The other two groups also did the same. They all held the torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right. They shouted, "Victory for the LORD and Gideon!" Every man stood in his place around the camp. Then the whole enemy army ran away screaming. While Gideon's men were blowing their trumpets, the LORD made the enemy army attack each other with their swords.

SAMUEL, A NEW PROPHET

Men like Joshua and Gideon were good soldiers. Good fighters were important, but a group of people called "prophets" were also becoming important. The prophet's job was to give God's message to the people. Samuel was one of the first prophets. He led the Israelites until they had their first king.

Promised to God before he was born

1 Samuel 1.9-20

The story of Samuel's birth is rather unusual. Having children was a sign of God's blessing. A childless woman was not held in honour. Hannah had no children and was unhappy. She went every year to Shiloh with her husband Elkanah and the whole family to offer sacrifices. On such occasions Hannah would feel very sad.

After the family had finished their meal in the house of the LORD at Shiloh, Hannah got up. She looked very sad. She cried as she prayed to the LORD. Meanwhile, Eli the priest was sitting in his place by the door. Hannah made a promise: "LORD Almighty, look at me, your servant! See my trouble and remember me! Don't forget me! If you give me a son, I promise that I will give him back to you to serve you all his life."

Hannah continued to pray to the LORD for a long time, and Eli watched her. She was praying silently, but her lips were moving. So Eli thought that she was drunk. He said to her, "Be quiet, you drunken woman! When will you be sober again?"

"No sir, I'm not drunk," she answered. "I need the LORD's help! I have been praying about my troubles before the LORD. Don't think I am a

silly woman. I have been praying like this because I'm so sad."

"Go in peace," Eli said. "May the God of Israel give you what you have asked him for."

"May your kindness be with me always," she replied. Then she went away, ate some food, and was no longer sad.

The next morning Elkanah and his family got up early. After worshipping the LORD, they went back home to Ramah. The LORD answered Hannah's prayer. She gave birth to a son. She said, "I asked the LORD for him. So I name him Samuel."

Hannah keeps her promise

1 Samuel 1.24-28

Hannah promised that her son would never have his hair cut. This seems strange to us now, but then it showed everyone that he was a Naziarite. The Naziarites were people who gave themselves to serve God.

While Samuel was still young, Hannah took him to Shiloh to the house of the LORD. She also took with her a three-year-old bull, some flour, and a leather bag full of wine as offerings to the LORD. The parents took the child to Eli. Hannah said to him, "Sir, do you remember me? I am the woman you once saw standing here, praying to the LORD. I asked him for this child, and he answered me. So I am giving him to the LORD to serve him as long as he lives."

Then they worshipped the LORD there.

Samuel hears God speak

1 Samuel 3.1-21

In those days, Eli was training the boy Samuel to serve the LORD. People rarely got any messages or visions from the LORD. One night Eli, who was now almost blind, was sleeping in his own room. Samuel was sleeping in the holy place, where the Covenant Box was kept. Before dawn, while the lamp was still burning, the LORD called Samuel. He answered, "Yes, sir!" Then he ran to Eli and said, "You called me. Here I am." But Eli answered, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed.

The LORD called Samuel again. The boy did not know that it was the LORD. The LORD had never spoken to him before. So he got up, went to Eli, and said, "You called me. Here I am." But Eli answered, "My son, I didn't call you. Go back to bed."

The LORD called Samuel a third time. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "You did call me, here I am." Then Eli knew that it was the LORD who was calling the boy. So he said to him, "Go back to bed. If he calls you again, say, 'Speak LORD, your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed.

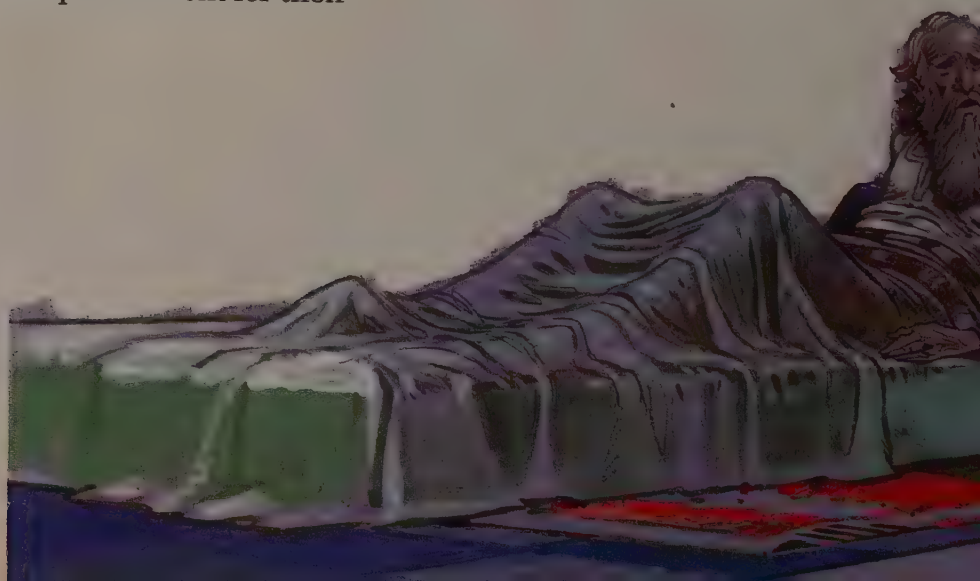
The LORD came and stood there, and called once more, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, LORD, your servant is listening."

The LORD said to him, "Soon I am going to do something terrible to the people of Israel. I have already warned Eli about his family. I will punish them forever because his sons have spoken evil things against me. Eli knew they were doing this, but he did not stop them. So I, the LORD God, say that no sacrifice or offering will ever remove the punishment for their sin."

Samuel stayed in bed until morning. Then he got up and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision he had at night. Eli called him, "Samuel, my boy!" "Yes, sir," answered Samuel.

"What did the LORD tell you?" Eli asked. "Don't hide anything from me. God will punish you if you don't tell me everything he said." So Samuel told him everything. Eli said, "He is the LORD. He will do whatever is best."

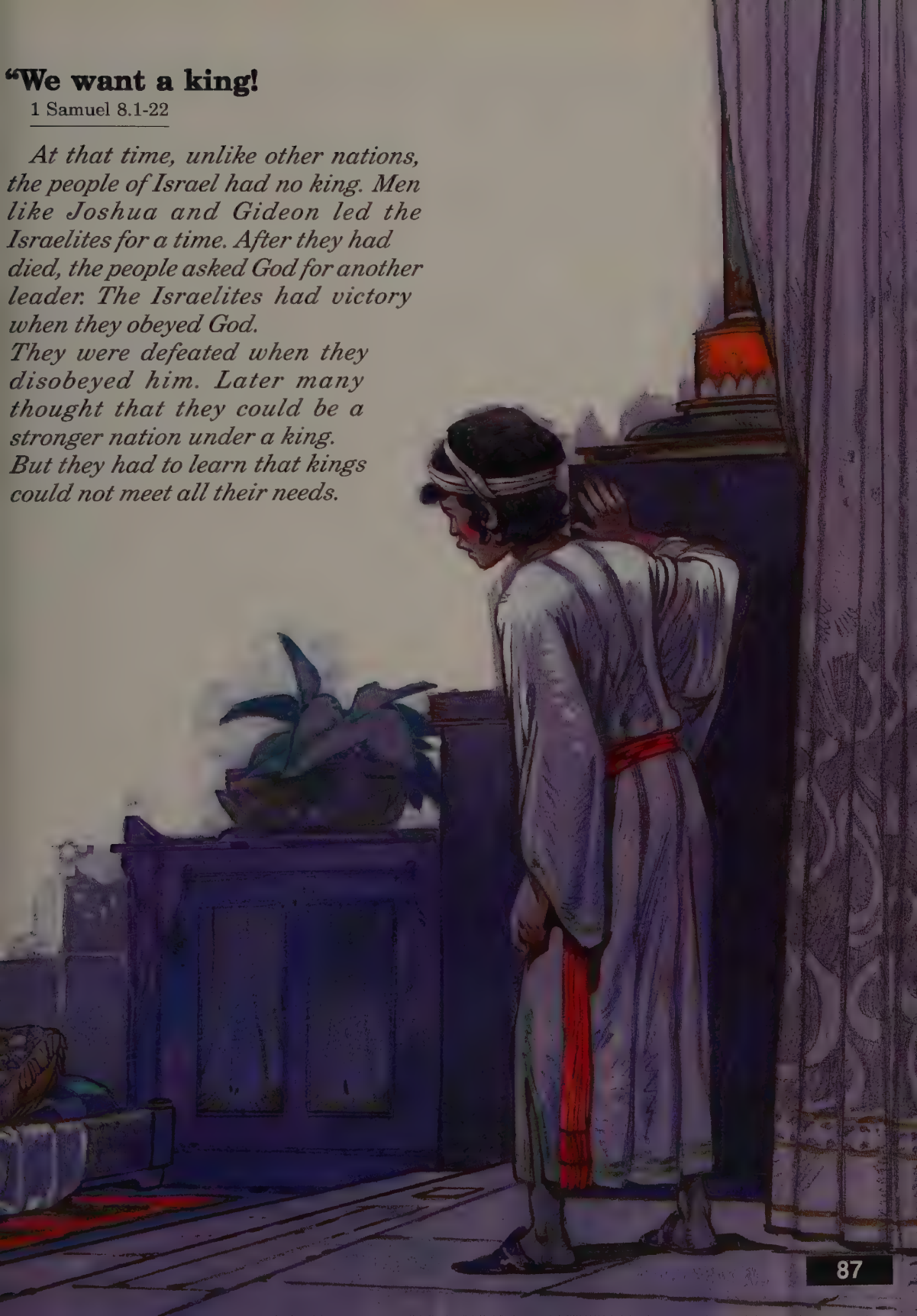
As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him. Everything that Samuel spoke in the LORD's name came true. So the Israelites all over the country knew that Samuel was indeed a man from the LORD. The LORD appeared again and again at Shiloh to Samuel and spoke to him. All the people of Israel listened to Samuel's words.



"We want a king!

1 Samuel 8.1-22

At that time, unlike other nations, the people of Israel had no king. Men like Joshua and Gideon led the Israelites for a time. After they had died, the people asked God for another leader. The Israelites had victory when they obeyed God.
They were defeated when they disobeyed him. Later many thought that they could be a stronger nation under a king.
But they had to learn that kings could not meet all their needs.



When Samuel grew old, he made his sons leaders in Israel. But they did not follow their father's ways. They were interested only in making money.

Then all the leaders of Israel went to meet Samuel in Ramah. They said to him, "Look, you are getting old, and your sons don't follow your ways. So then, appoint a king to rule over us, just as other peoples have their own kings." Samuel was unhappy that they asked for a king. So he prayed to the LORD. The LORD said, "Listen to everything the people say to you. You are not the one they do not want. I am the one they do not want as their king. I brought them out of Egypt. But they have turned away from me and worshipped other gods. Now they are doing to you what they have always done to me. Listen to them, but warn them. Explain to them how their kings will treat them."

Samuel told the men everything that the LORD had said to him. "This is how your king will treat you," he explained. "He will make soldiers of your sons. He will make them drive his chariots and be his horsemen. He will make some of them officers in charge of 1,000 men, and others in charge of 50 men. Your sons will have to plough his fields and harvest his crops. They will have to make his weapons and things needed for his chariots. Your daughters will have to make perfumes for him. They will have to work as his cooks and bakers. He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive gardens for his servants. He will take a tenth of your crops for all his officers and servants. He will take your servants, your best cattle and donkeys and make them work for him. He will take a tenth of your flocks. You yourselves will become his slaves. You will complain because of the king you chose, but the LORD will not listen to you."

The people paid no attention to Samuel, but said, "No! We want a king. We want to be like other nations. Our own king must rule us and lead us in war." Samuel listened to everything they said, and then told it to the LORD. The LORD answered, "Do what they want and give them a king." Then Samuel told all the men of Israel to go back home.

The Israelites get their first king

1 Samuel 10.17-25

Samuel called the people of Israel together for a religious gathering at Mizpah. He told them, "The LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'I brought you out of Egypt. I saved you from the Egyptians and all the other people who troubled you. I am your God, the One who saves you from all your troubles. But today you don't want me. You have asked me for a king.' Very well, then, gather yourselves before the LORD by tribes and by clans."

Then Samuel had each tribe come forward, and the LORD chose the tribe of Benjamin. Now the families of the tribe of Benjamin were asked to come forward, and the family of Matri was picked out. From the family of Matri, Saul son of Kish was picked out. They looked for him, but could not find him. They asked the LORD, "Is

there still someone else?" The LORD answered, "Saul is over there, hiding behind the baggage."

So they ran and brought Saul out to the front. He was a foot taller than anyone else. Samuel said to the people, "Here is the man the LORD has chosen! There is no one else among us like him." All the people shouted, "Long live the king!" Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of a king. He wrote them in a book, which he kept in a holy place. Then he sent everyone home.

RUTH, A GREAT GRANDMOTHER

Israel's first king, Saul, was a great disappointment. The second king was David who was the greatest king that Israel ever had. During his reign the country grew in size and importance. David's story begins with the story of his great grandmother.

Ruth leaves home

Ruth 1.1-19

Not many Israelites ever left their country. It was also unusual for them to marry people from other countries.

There was a famine in the land of Israel. So a man named Elimelech from the town of Bethlehem in Judah went with his family to live in the country of Moab. His wife was Naomi and their two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. While they were living there, Elimelech died. Naomi was left with her two sons. The sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. About ten years later, Mahlon and Chilion also died. Naomi was now left all alone.

Some time later, Naomi heard that the LORD had blessed his people. There were good crops again in the land of Israel. So she returned to Judah with her daughters-in-law. On the way Naomi said to them, "Go back home and stay with your mothers. May the LORD be as good to you as you have been to me and to those who have died. May the LORD give you both new husbands and families." So Naomi kissed them good-bye. But they

started crying and said to her, "No! We will go with you to your people."

"You must go back, my daughters," Naomi answered. "Why do you want to come with me and remain widows? The LORD is against me, and I feel sorry for you."

Again they started crying. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye and went back home. But Ruth would not leave Naomi. So Naomi said to Ruth, "Your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god. Go back home with her."

But Ruth answered, "Please, don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you wherever you go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die. May the LORD punish me, if I leave you before I die!"

Naomi saw that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her. So she said nothing more.

They travelled together to Bethlehem. When they arrived, the whole town became excited. The people were happy to have them back. The women said, "Is this really Naomi?"

Ruth works in the fields

Ruth 2.1-3,14-19

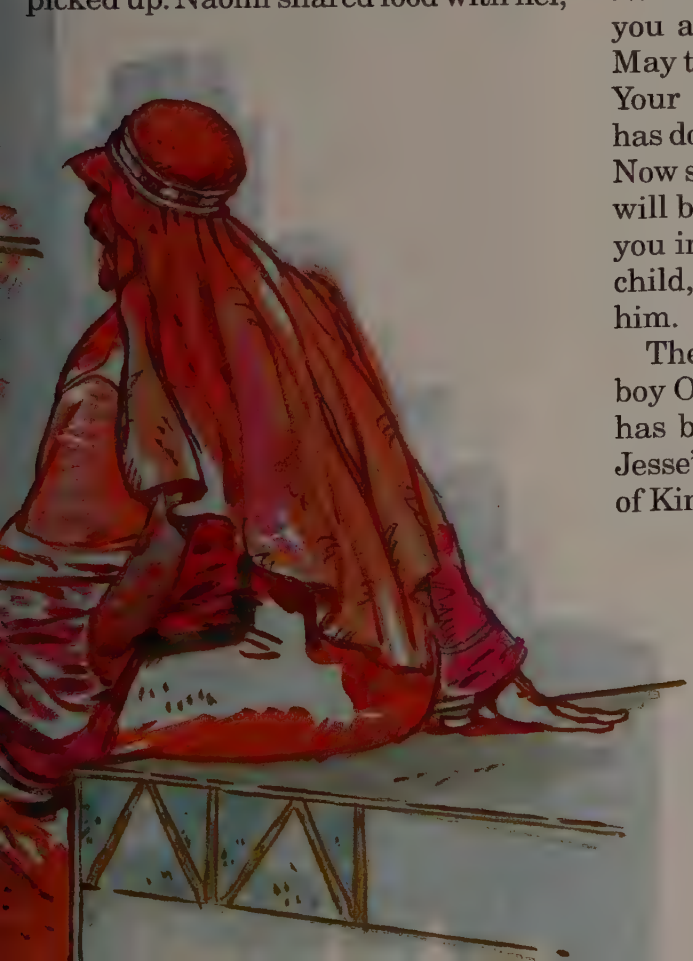
Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem like refugees, with almost nothing. It was the custom to allow poor people to pick up the corn which got left behind at harvest time.

There was a rich and well-known man named Boaz. He was related to Naomi's dead husband. One day Ruth said to Naomi, "This is harvest time. Let me go to the fields to gather the grain that the workers drop. I am sure to find someone who will be kind to me." Naomi answered, "Go ahead, daughter."

So Ruth went out to the fields. It so happened that she was in a field that belonged to Boaz. She walked behind the workers, picking up the heads of

grain which they left. At mealtime Boaz called Ruth and said, "Come and have a piece of bread, and dip it in the sauce." So she sat with the workers to eat. Boaz passed some roasted grain to her. She ate until she was satisfied, and she still had some food left over. She then started again to gather grain. Boaz ordered the workers, "Let her gather grain even where the bundles are kept, and don't stop her. You may also pull out some heads of grain from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up."

Ruth worked in the field the whole day. By evening she gathered a large basketful of grain. She went to town, and showed to Naomi what she had picked up. Naomi shared food with her, and said, "where did you work today? Whose field was it? God bless the man who treated you so well!" Then Ruth told her that she had worked in the field of a man named Boaz.



Ruth marries Boaz

Ruth 4.13-22

From this part of Ruth's story we learn that the greatest of the Israelite kings was partly descended from a foreigner. Although the Israelites were special people, God would use others as well to carry out his plans.

Boaz took Ruth home as his wife. The LORD blessed her, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi, "Praise the LORD! He has given you a grandson to take care of you. May the boy become famous in Israel! Your daughter-in-law loves you. She has done more for you than seven sons. Now she has given you a grandson. He will bring new life to you and protect you in your old age." Naomi took the child, held him close, and took care of him.

The women of the town named the boy Obed. They told everyone, "A son has been born to Naomi!" Obed was Jesse's father, and Jesse was the father of King David.

DAVID, A FEARLESS YOUNG MAN

A shepherd boy chosen to be king

1 Samuel 16.1-13

King Saul had disobeyed God's commands. So God ordered Samuel to anoint another king in his place.

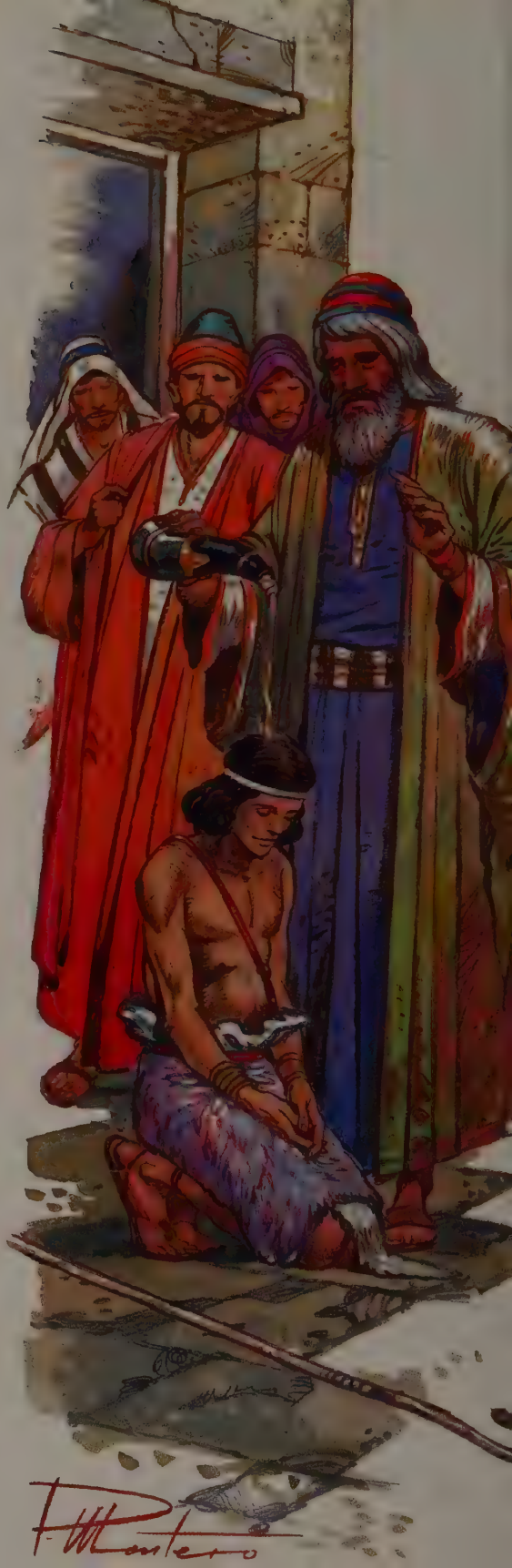
The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you go on worrying over Saul? I do not want him as king of Israel any more. I have chosen one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem in place of Saul. Go there with some olive oil and anoint him as king."

"How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "If Saul hears about it, he will kill me!" The LORD answered, "Take a calf with you and let everyone know that you are there to offer a sacrifice to the LORD. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice. I will tell you what to do and show you the man to be made king."

So Samuel went to Bethlehem. The leaders of the city were afraid because of this visit by the man of God. "Does this visit mean peace or war?" they asked him.

Samuel said to them, "I bring peace. I have come to offer a sacrifice to the LORD. Get ready to attend the sacrifice." He specially invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Jesse's son Eliab was there. Samuel thought that he was the one chosen by the LORD to be king. But the LORD said to him, "pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I don't want him, because I do not think like man.



Man looks at the outside, but I look at the heart."

Then Jesse called in his son Abinadab. But Samuel said, "No, the LORD hasn't chosen him either." Jesse then brought Shammah. "No, the LORD hasn't chosen him either," Samuel said. In this way Jesse brought seven of his sons to Samuel. Samuel said to him, "No, the LORD hasn't chosen any of them." Then he asked him, "Do you have any more sons?"

Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest. But he is out taking care of the sheep."

"Send for him," Samuel said. "We won't offer the sacrifice until he comes." So Jesse sent for David. He was a handsome, healthy young man. The LORD said to Samuel, "This is the one. Anoint him as king!" Samuel took some olive oil and poured it on David's head. He blessed him in front of his brothers. Immediately the spirit of the LORD took control of David and remained with him from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

Goliath challenges the Israelites

1 Samuel 17.2-11

Saul and the Israelite army gathered to fight the Philistines. The Philistine army was up on one hill, and the Israelite army was on the opposite hill. There was a valley between them.

Goliath, a Philistine giant, came out from their camp to challenge the Israelites. He was nearly three metres tall. He wore heavy bronze armour and a bronze helmet. His legs were also protected by bronze armour. He had a bronze javelin. His spear was very thick with a sharp iron point. A soldier walked in front of him carrying his shield. Goliath stood and shouted at the Israelites, "What are you doing there, you slaves of Saul? Choose one of your men to fight me. If he wins and kills me, we will be your slaves. If I win and kill him, you will be our slaves. I dare someone to fight me!" Saul and his men were frightened by these words.

David's courage

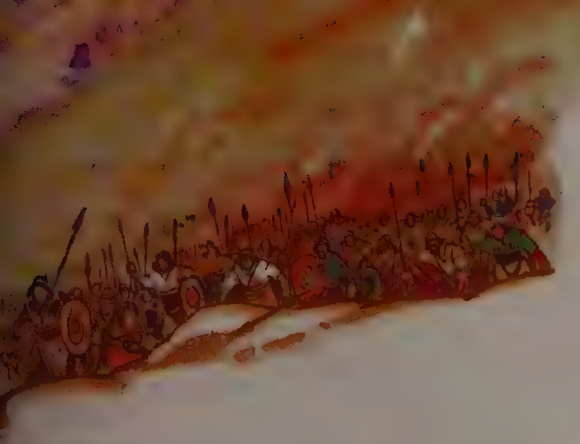
1 Samuel 17.12-40

David's three oldest brothers were in the Israelite army led by King Saul.

Goliath challenged the Israelites every morning and evening for forty days.

One day Jesse said to his son David, "Go and find out how your brothers are getting along in the army camp. Take some of this roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread. Give these ten pieces of cheese to the commanding officer."

David got up early the next morning. He put someone else in charge of the sheep. He took the food, and went to meet his brothers. When he arrived at the camp, the army was shouting the war cry. The Philistine and the Israelite armies stood facing each other, ready for battle. David left the food with an officer and ran to the battle line. He went to his brothers and asked how they were getting along. Just then Goliath came



forward and challenged the Israelites again. When the Israelites saw Goliath, they ran away in terror. "Look at him!" they said to each other. "Listen to his challenge! King Saul has promised to give a big reward to the man who kills him. The king will also give him his daughter to marry. Even the family will not need to pay taxes."

David asked, "What will the man get who kills this godless Philistine? Who is he to defy the army of the living God!"

Eliab, David's eldest brother, heard David talking to the men. He became angry with David and said, "What are you doing here? Who is taking care of those sheep of yours? You came just to watch the fighting!"

"What have I done?" David asked. "Can't I even ask a question?"

Some men went and told Saul about David. So the king sent for him. David said to Saul, "Your Majesty, no one should be afraid of this Philistine! I will go and fight him."

"No," answered Saul. "How could you fight him? You're just a boy. He has been a soldier all his life!"

"Your Majesty," David said, "I take care of my father's sheep. Any time a lion or a bear carries off a lamb, I go after it. I attack it and bring back the lamb. If the lion or bear turns on me, I grab it by the throat and beat it to death. What I have done to those wild animals, I will do the same to Goliath. He mocks the army of the living God! The LORD who saved me from lions and bears will save me from this Philistine."

"All right," Saul answered. "Go! May the LORD be with you." So he gave his own armour to David. He put a bronze helmet on David's head, and gave him a coat of armour. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour. When he tried to walk, he could not. "I can't fight with all this," he said to Saul. "I'm not used to it." So he took it all off. Then he took his shepherd's stick. He chose five smooth stones from the stream, and put them in his bag. With his sling ready, he went out to meet Goliath.

David fights Goliath

1 Samuel 17.41-54

Goliath started walking towards David. His shield-bearer was going in front of him. When Goliath came close enough, he saw that David was only a boy. He said to David, "What's that stick for? Do you think I'm a dog?" He called down curses from his god on David. "Come on," he shouted to David. "I will give your body to the birds and animals to eat."

David answered, "You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin. But I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, whom you have mocked. This very day the

LORD will put you in my power. I will defeat you and cut off your head. I will give the bodies of your soldiers to the birds and animals to eat. Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God. Everyone will see that the LORD does not need swords or spears to save his people. He always wins his battles. He will defeat your army for us."

Goliath started walking toward David again, and David ran quickly toward him. He took a stone from his bag and slung it at Goliath. It hit him on the forehead and broke his skull. He fell face downwards on the ground. So David defeated and killed Goliath with only a sling and a stone! He ran to him and stood over him. He pulled out Goliath's sword and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they ran away. The Israelite soldiers ran after them, shouting and chasing them. The Philistines fell wounded all along the road. When the Israelites came back after chasing the Philistines, they looted their camp. David got Goliath's head and took it to Jerusalem. But he kept Goliath's weapons in his own tent.

David is presented to Saul

1 Samuel 17.57-18.5

So when David returned to camp after killing Goliath, Abner, the commander, took him to Saul. David was still carrying Goliath's head. Saul asked him, "Young man, whose son are you?"

"I am the son of your servant Jesse from Bethlehem," David answered.

Saul's son Jonathan became very fond of David. They agreed to become friends forever. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, together with his armour and also his sword, bow, and belt. Saul kept David with him from that day on and did not let him go back home to Bethlehem. David was successful in all the battles to which Saul sent him. So Saul made him an officer in his army. This pleased Saul's officers and men.

Saul becomes jealous of David

1 Samuel 18.6-16

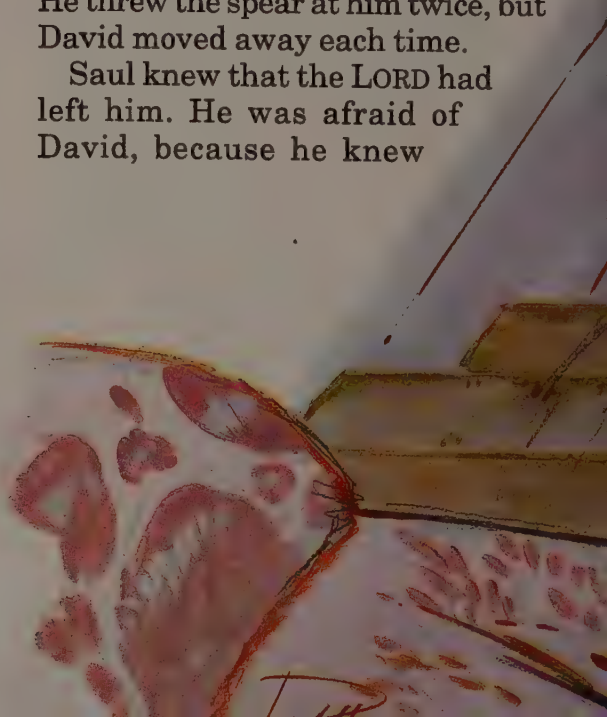
David was going home after killing Goliath. The soldiers were also returning home. Women from every town in Israel came out to meet King Saul. They were singing joyful songs, dancing, and playing music. The women sang,

"Saul has killed thousands,
but David tens of thousands!"

Saul did not like this, and he became very angry. He said, "They give me less honour than David. Next they will make him king!" So he was jealous of David, and watched him carefully from that day on.

The next day, an evil spirit suddenly took control of Saul. He behaved like a mad man in his house. David was playing the harp, as he did everyday and Saul was holding a spear. "I'll pin him to the wall," Saul said to himself. He threw the spear at him twice, but David moved away each time.

Saul knew that the LORD had left him. He was afraid of David, because he knew



that the LORD was with David. So Saul sent him away, and put him in command of a thousand soldiers. David led his men in battle, and always won victories. The LORD was with him. Saul noticed David's success, and became even more afraid of him. But all the people loved David, because he was such an able leader.

Jonathan helps David

1 Samuel 20.1-23

Jonathan, Saul's son, would have expected to be king after his father. Since Saul was so jealous of David, it is surprising that Jonathan and David were such good friends.

David fled from Saul and went to Jonathan. "Your father is trying to kill me!" he said. "What wrong have I done?"

Jonathan answered, "God forbid that you should die! My father tells me everything he does. He would not hide this from me. He has no plans to kill you!"

But David answered, "Your father knows very well how much you like me. He has decided not to let you know his plans, because he doesn't want to hurt you. But be sure that I am only a step away from death!"

Jonathan said, "I'll do anything you want."

"Tomorrow is the New Moon Festival," David replied, "and I am invited to attend the king's dinner. If you agree, I will go and hide in the fields. Your father may ask why I am not at the table. Tell him that I got your permission to hurry home to Bethlehem for the yearly family feast. If he says, 'All right', I will be safe. But if he becomes angry, you will know that he wants to kill me. But please keep the promise of friendship you made to me. If I'm guilty, kill me yourself! Why should I be killed by your father?"

"Why do you think like that?" Jonathan answered. "If I knew that my father was planning to kill you,

wouldn't I tell you?"

David then asked, "How will I know if your father gets angry with you?"

"Let's go out to the fields," Jonathan answered. So they went. Jonathan said to David, May the LORD God of Israel be our witness! At this time tomorrow and the day after, I will question my father. If he thinks well of you, I will send you word. If he plans to kill you, I promise before the LORD that I'll let you know about it, and get you safely away. May the LORD be with you, as he was with my father! If I remain alive, please keep our promise of friendship. If I die, be always good to my family. When the LORD has completely destroyed all your enemies, may the LORD help you to keep our promise to each other."

Once again Jonathan made David promise to love him, for Jonathan loved David as much as he loved himself. Then Jonathan said to him, "If you are not present tomorrow at the New Moon Festival, everyone will notice it. The day tomorrow, your absence will be noticed even more. So go to the same place as before, and hide behind the heap of stones there. I will shoot three arrows at it. Then I will tell my servant to go and find them. If I tell him, 'The arrows are on this side of you. Get them!, that means you are sure to be safe and can come out. But if I tell him, 'The arrows are on the other side of you,' then leave, because the LORD is sending you away. May the LORD always help us to keep our promise to each other."

The secret sign to escape

1 Samuel 20.24-41

So David hid in the fields. At the New Moon Festival, King Saul sat in his usual place by the wall. Abner sat next to him, and Jonathan sat across the table from him. David's place was empty. But Saul said nothing that day. On the second day of the feast, David's place was still empty. Saul asked Jonathan, "Way didn't David come to the meal either yesterday or today?

Jonathan replied that David had gone to Bethlehem for the family festival at the request of his brother. Saul became angry with Jonathan and said to him, "You worthless son, you are as unfaithful to me as your mother! Now I know you are taking sides with David. You are bringing shame on yourself and the whole family! Don't you know that as long as David lives, you will never be king of this country? Now go and bring him here. He must die!"

"Why should he die?" Jonathan replied. "What wrong has he done?"

Now Saul threw his spear at Jonathan to kill him. Jonathan had no doubt that his father really wanted to kill David. Jonathan got up from the table in a rage, and ate nothing that day. He was very sad about David, because of what Saul had said. The next morning Jonathan went to the fields to meet David, as they had agreed. He took a boy with him and said to him, "Run and find the arrows I'm going to shoot." The boy ran, and Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him.

When the boy reached the place where the arrow was, Jonathan shouted to him, "The arrow is on the other side. Go and get it quickly!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master, not knowing what it all meant. Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and told him to take them back to town.

After the boy had left, David got up from behind the heap of stones. He bowed down with his face to the ground three times. Both he and Jonathan cried, and kissed each other. David's grief was even greater then Jonathan's.

David spares the king's life

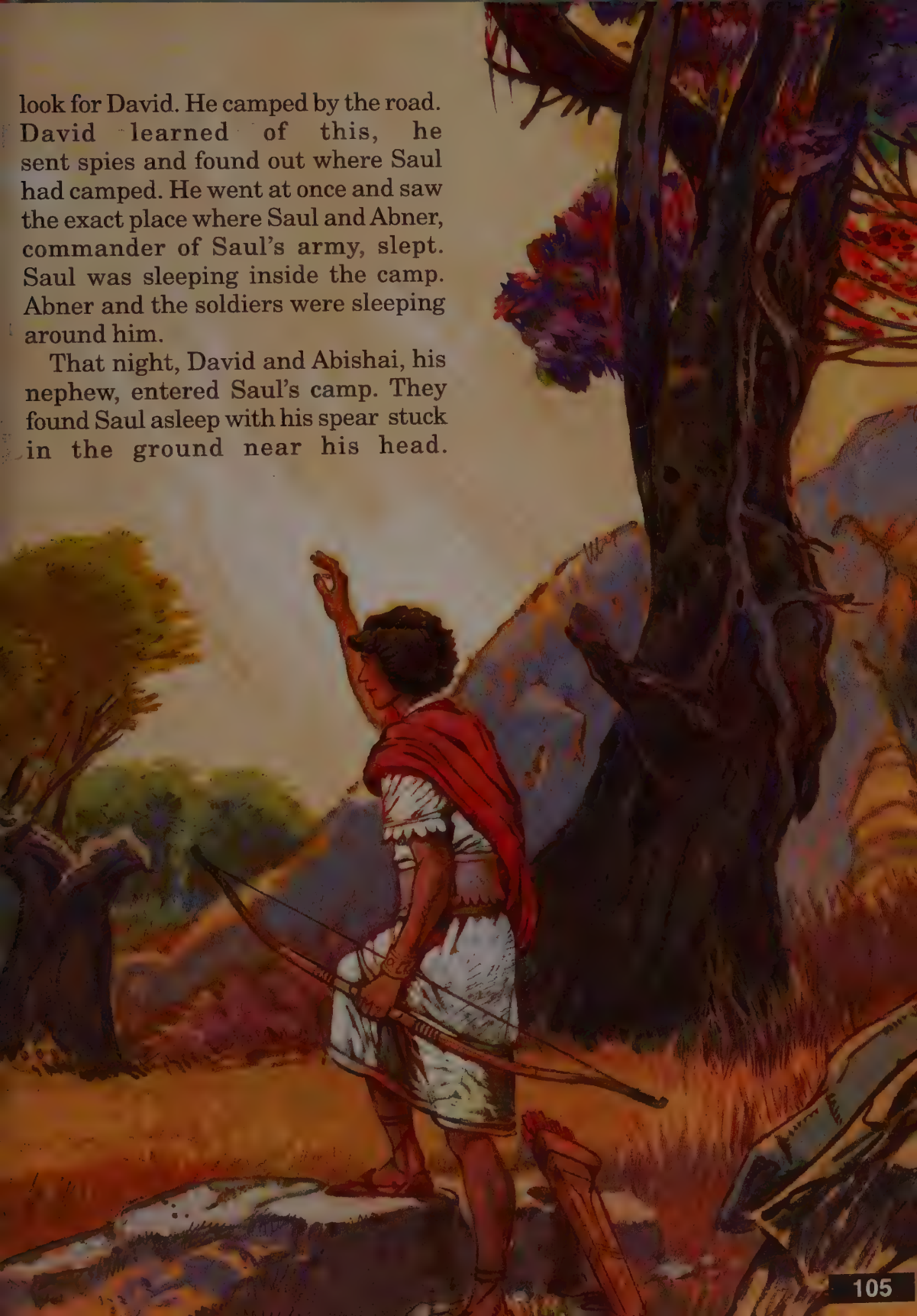
1 Samuel 26.1-25

Saul went on trying to kill David. But David had been anointed to be king by the prophet Samuel. He was very popluar with the people. At times David was tempted to take a short-cut to power by doing something very wrong. But God gave him the strength not to do this.

Some men came to Saul at Gibeah and told him that David was hiding at the edge of the wilderness near a mountain. Saul went at once with three thousand of his best soldiers to

look for David. He camped by the road. David learned of this, he sent spies and found out where Saul had camped. He went at once and saw the exact place where Saul and Abner, commander of Saul's army, slept. Saul was sleeping inside the camp. Abner and the soldiers were sleeping around him.

That night, David and Abishai, his nephew, entered Saul's camp. They found Saul asleep with his spear stuck in the ground near his head.



Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy to you tonight. Now let me plunge his own spear through him and pin him to the ground with just one strike!"

But David said, "You must not kill him! The LORD will certainly punish whoever kills his chosen king. I am sure that the LORD himself will kill Saul. The LORD forbid that I should try to kill the one whom the LORD has made King! Let's just take his spear and his water jar, and go." So David took the spear and the water jar from near Saul's head, and Abishai left. No one in the camp knew what had happened. The LORD had sent a heavy sleep on them all.

Then David crossed over to the other side of the valley to the top of the hill, a safe distance away. He shouted to Saul's troops and to Abner, "Abner! Can you hear me?"

"Who is that shouting and waking up the king?" Abner asked.

David answered, "Abner, aren't you the top officer in Israel? Why aren't you guarding your king? Just now someone entered the camp to kill your master. You failed in your duty, Abner! You did not protect your master whom the LORD made king. Look! Where is the king's spear? Where is the water jar that was right by his head?"

Saul knew it was David's voice and asked, "David, is that you, my son?"

"Yes, Your Mejesty," David answered. "Why, sir, are you still chasing after me, your servant? What wrong have

I done? Don't let me be killed in a foreign land, away from the LORD. Why should the king of Israel come to kill a flea like me? Why should he hunt me down like a wild bird?"

Saul answered, "I have done wrong. Come back, David, my son! I will never harm you again, because you have spared my life tonight. I have been a fool! I have done a terrible thing!"

David replied, "Here is your spear, Your Majesty. Let one of your men come over and get it. The LORD rewards those who are faithful and do the right thing. Today he gave me a good chance to kill you. But I did not want to do so because the LORD has chosen you to be king. I have kept you alive today. May the LORD do the same to me and keep me safe from all troubles!"

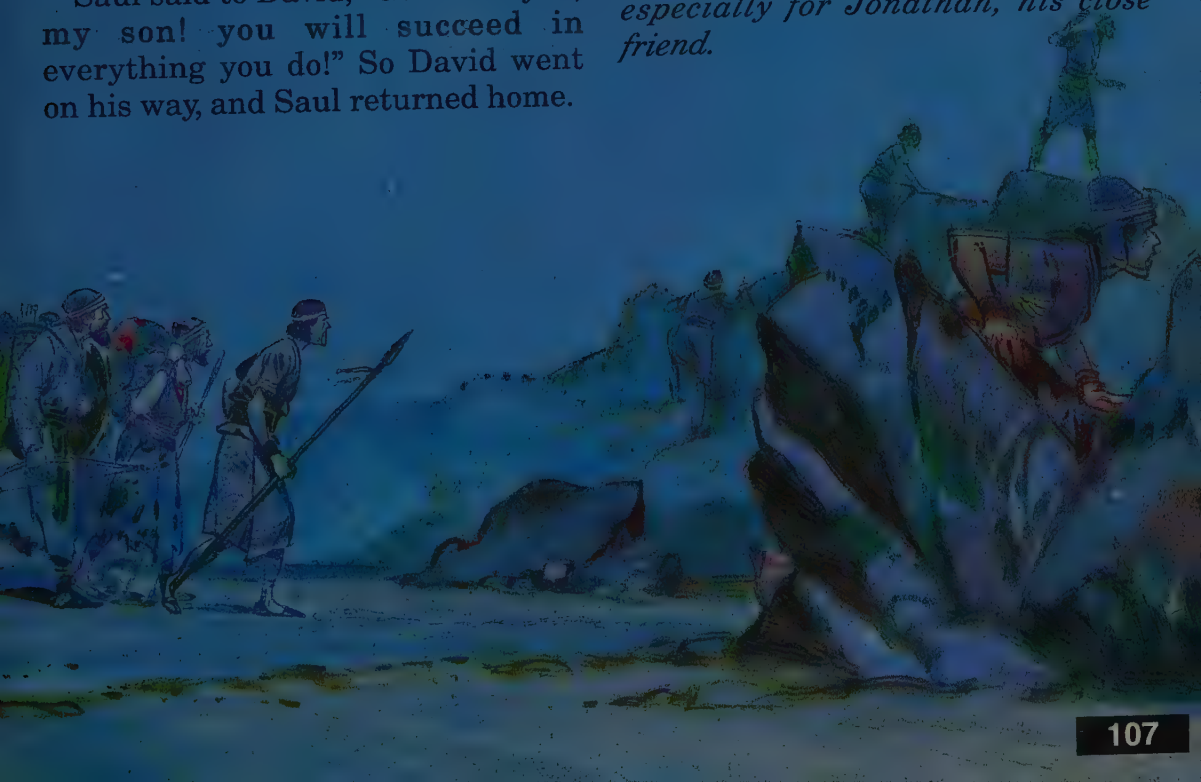
Saul said to David, "God bless you, my son! you will succeed in everything you do!" So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

Saul's sad end

1 Samuel 31.1-6

The Philistines fought a battle against the Israelites on Mount Gilboa. Many Israelites were killed there. The rest of them, including King Saul and his sons, fled. But the Philistines caught up with them and killed three of Saul's sons, including Jonathan. The fighting was heavy around Saul, and he himself was badly wounded by enemy arrows. He said to his young arms-bearer, "Kill me with your sword, so that these godless Philistines won't insult me and kill me." But the young man was too afraid to do it. So Saul took his own sword and threw himself on it. When the young man saw that Saul was dead, he too threw himself on his own sword and died.

David felt very sad for King Saul and especially for Jonathan, his close friend.



Great kings and brave prophets

Times changed. The Israelites now had most of Canaan as their country. They lived in walled cities. Jerusalem became the capital city of Israel. But other tribes and countries nearby still gave them trouble. Following the ways of those people, many Israelites began to worship idols. The prophets often had to remind the people, and even their kings, about their agreement with God.

DAVID THE KING

King Saul was not liked by most of his people. Many of them did not want to be under his rule. When David became king, he brought together the people who had wanted to separate. David's army was well trained. This helped the Israelites to make their own kingdom. When the kingdom became larger and stronger, David spent his time in a palace in Jerusalem.

David is thankful

2 Samuel 7.18,20,22-23,28-29

King David wanted to talk to the LORD. He sat down and prayed, "LORD God, I am not worthy of what you have already done for me. How great you are, LORD God! There is none like you. There is no nation on earth like Israel. You rescued us from slavery to make us your own people. You are God. You always keep your promises. I ask you to bless my descendants, so that they will continue to enjoy your favour."

David is kind

2 Samuel 9.1-13

One day David asked, "Is there anyone left of Saul's family? If there is, I would like to show him kindness for Jonathan's sake."

Ziba, a servant of Saul's family, told David, "There is still one of Jonathan's sons. He is crippled."

So King David sent for him.

When Mephibosheth arrived, he bowed down before David.

"Don't be afraid. I will be kind to you for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will give you back all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul. You will always be welcome at my table."

Mephibosheth bowed again and

said, "I am no better than a dead dog, Your Majesty! Why should you be so good to me?"

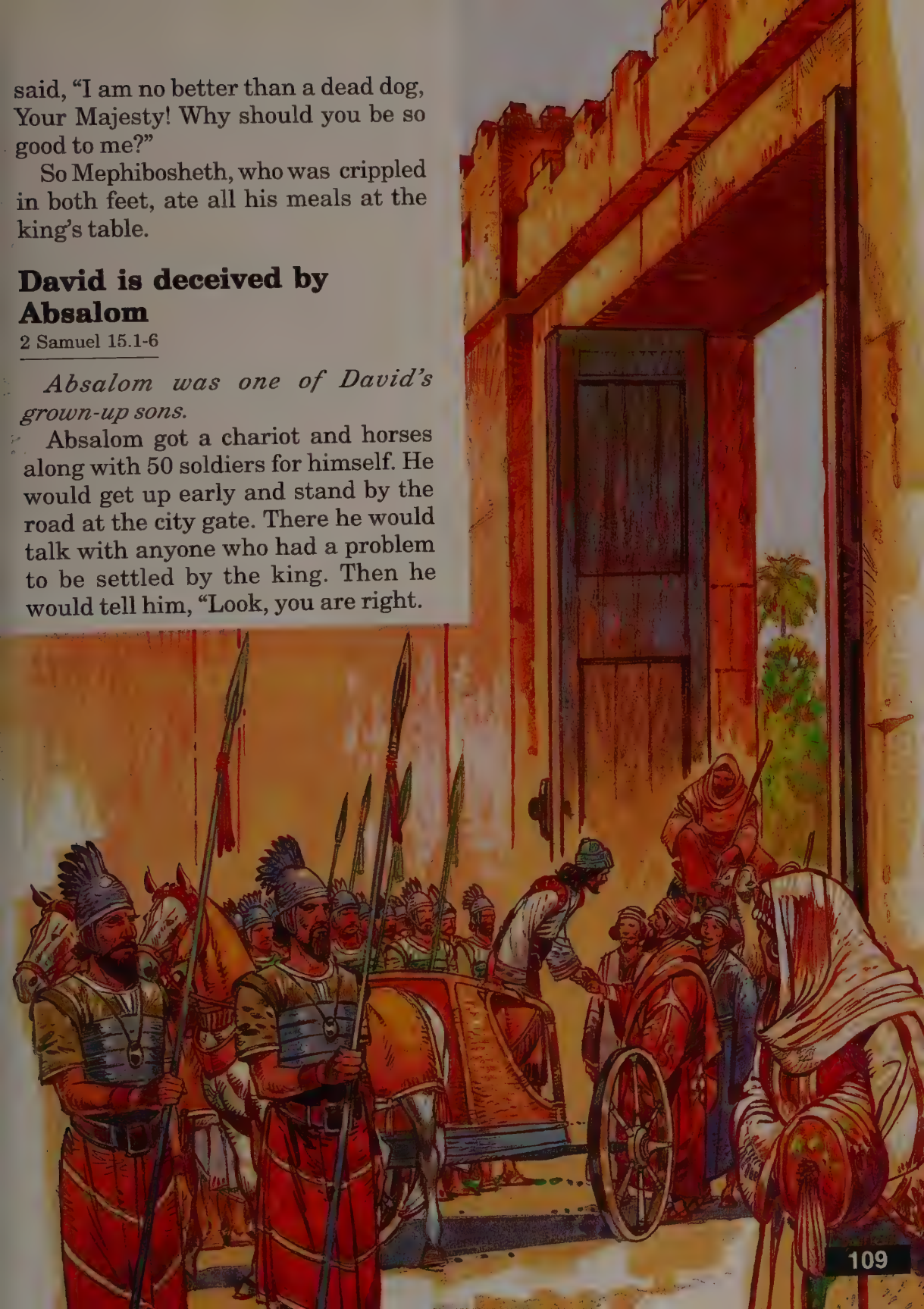
So Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, ate all his meals at the king's table.

David is deceived by Absalom

2 Samuel 15.1-6

Absalom was one of David's grown-up sons.

Absalom got a chariot and horses along with 50 soldiers for himself. He would get up early and stand by the road at the city gate. There he would talk with anyone who had a problem to be settled by the king. Then he would tell him, "Look, you are right.



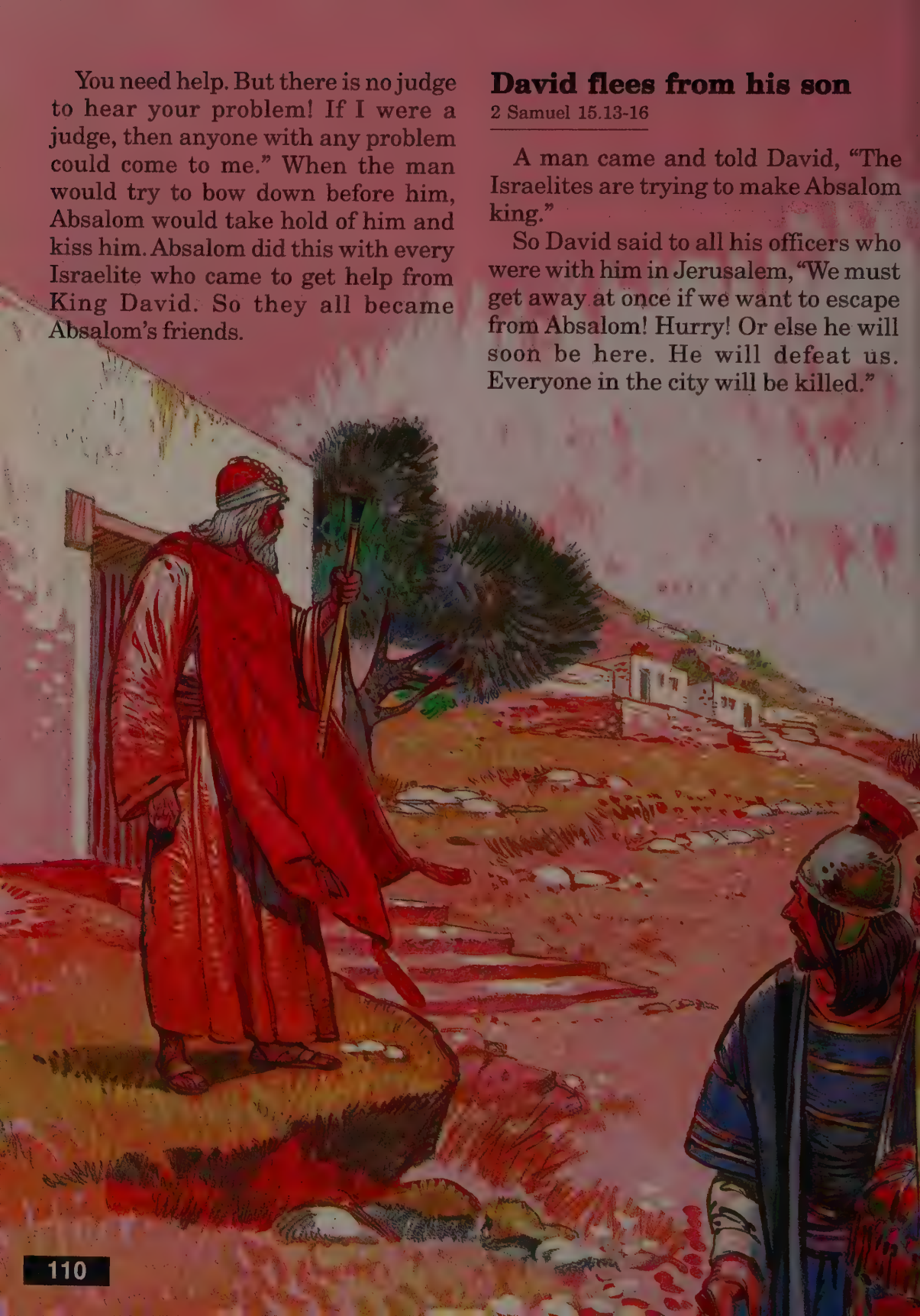
You need help. But there is no judge to hear your problem! If I were a judge, then anyone with any problem could come to me." When the man would try to bow down before him, Absalom would take hold of him and kiss him. Absalom did this with every Israelite who came to get help from King David. So they all became Absalom's friends.

David flees from his son

2 Samuel 15.13-16

A man came and told David, "The Israelites are trying to make Absalom king."

So David said to all his officers who were with him in Jerusalem, "We must get away at once if we want to escape from Absalom! Hurry! Or else he will soon be here. He will defeat us. Everyone in the city will be killed."



"Yes, Your Majesty," they answered. "We are ready to do whatever you say." So the king left the city with all his family and officers.

The big battle

2 Samuel 17.24,27-29;18.1-18

Absalom and his men crossed the Jordan to chase David. David had reached the town of Mahanaim. He was met there by several friends.

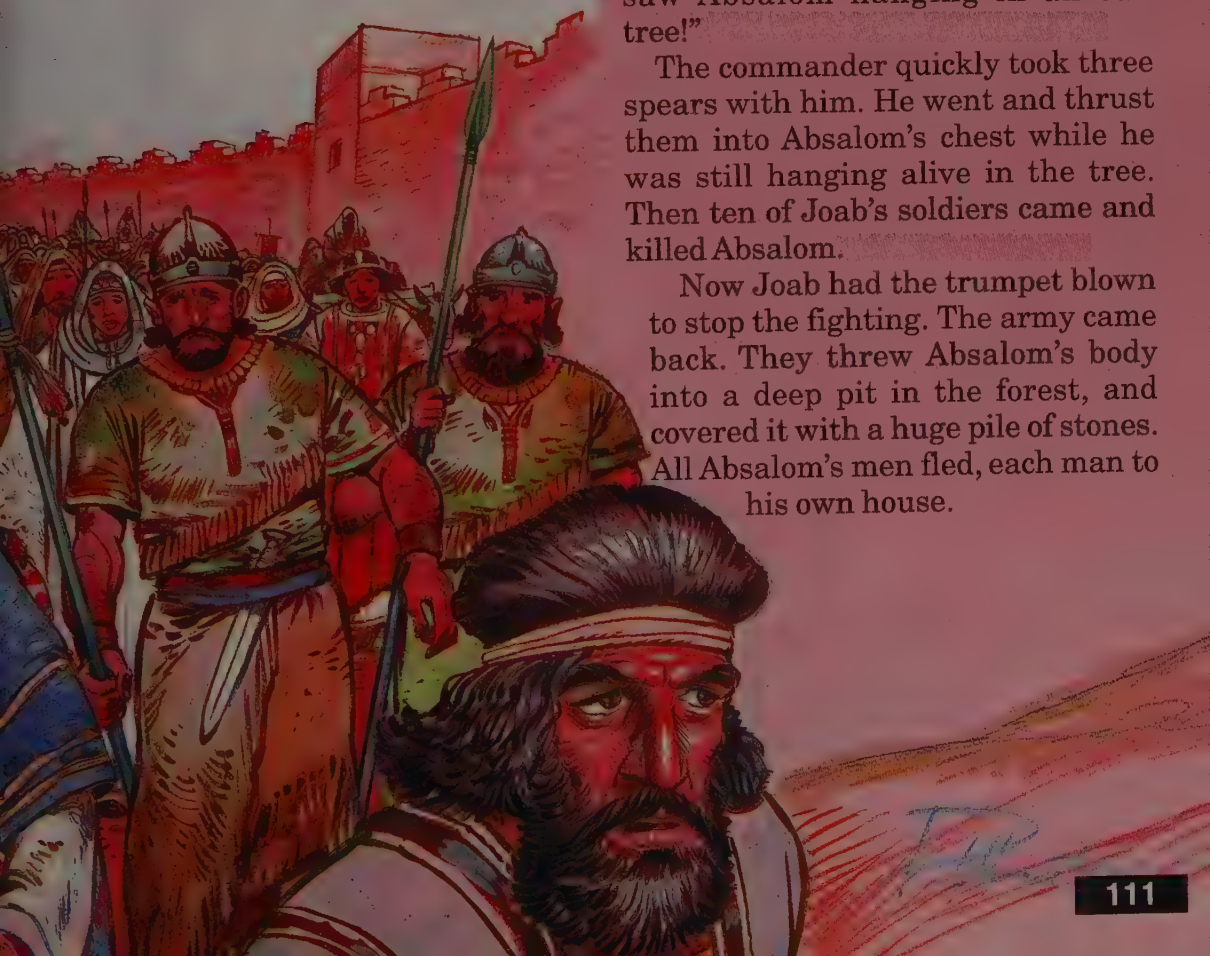
King David brought all his men together. He divided them into units of 1,000 and 100 and put officers in charge of them. He told the commanders in the hearing of all the soldiers, "For my sake, don't hurt Prince Absalom."

David's army went out and fought Absalom's army in the forest. They were badly defeated by David's men. Twenty thousand men were killed that day. The fighting spread over the countryside. More men died in the forest than in the battle.

Suddenly, Absalom met some of David's men. Absalom was riding a mule. As it went under a large oak tree, Absalom's head got caught in the thick branches. The mule ran on and Absalom was left hanging in the air. One of David's men saw him and reported to commander Joab, "Sir, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree!"

The commander quickly took three spears with him. He went and thrust them into Absalom's chest while he was still hanging alive in the tree. Then ten of Joab's soldiers came and killed Absalom.

Now Joab had the trumpet blown to stop the fighting. The army came back. They threw Absalom's body into a deep pit in the forest, and covered it with a huge pile of stones. All Absalom's men fled, each man to his own house.



David is shocked

2 Samuel 18.19-33

Then Ahimaaz, the son of a priest, said to Joab, "Let me run to the king with the good news that the LORD has saved him from his enemies."

"Then go!" Joab said. So Ahimaaz ran down the road through the Jordan Valley.

Ahimaaz greeted the king, threw himself down before him, and said, "Praise the LORD God. He has given you victory over the men who rose against Your Majesty!"

"Is prince Absalom safe?" the king asked. At that time a slave arrived and said to the king, "I have good news for Your Majesty! Today the LORD has given you victory!" "Is prince Absalom safe?" the king asked again. The slave answered, "I wish what has happened to him would happen to all your enemies, sir." Then King David knew his son had been killed! He was filled with sorrow. He went up to the room over the gateway and cried, "O my son! My son Absalom! Absalom, my son! If only I had died in your place, my son! Absalom, my son!"

SOLOMON IS KING

David had been known as a hard fighter. When he died he left a strong, united kingdom to his son Solomon. Solomon became well known for his wisdom and wealth. There was peace during his rule.

Solomon listens to his father

1 Kings 2.1-3

When David was about to die, he called his son Solomon and gave him his last words of advice, "My time to die has come. Be bold and firm. Do what the LORD your God orders you to do. Obey all his commands, as written in the Law of Moses. Then everything will be all right with you."

Solomon prays for wisdom

1 Kings 3.5-15

One day, the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him, "What would you like me to give you?"

Solomon answered, "You always showed great love for my father David, your servant. He always obeyed you and was good and honest before you. O LORD God, you have let me follow my father as king, even though I am very young and don't know how to rule. So give me the wisdom to rule your people well and to know the difference between right and wrong. Without wisdom, how can I ever rule this great people of yours?"

God was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom. So he said to him,

"You did not ask for long life or riches or the death of your enemies. I will give you what you have asked for. I will give you more wisdom and understanding than anyone has had at any time. I will also give you what you have not asked for. All your life you will have more riches and honour than any other king. If you obey me and keep my commands, as your father David did, I will give you a long life."

Solomon woke up and knew that God had spoken to him in the dream.

Solomon's prayer answered

1 Kings 3.16-28

One day two bad women came to King Solomon. One of them said, "Your Majesty, this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby boy at home while she was there. Two days after my child was born, she also gave birth to a baby boy. Only the two of us were there in the house. One night she rolled over on her baby by mistake and he died. She took my son from my side while I was asleep, and carried him to her bed. Then she put the dead child in my bed. The next morning, when I was going to nurse my baby, I saw that it was dead. I looked at it more closely and saw that it was not my child."

But the other woman said, "No! The living child is mine. The dead one is yours!" The first woman answered back, "No! The dead child is yours. The living one is mine!" And so they shouted back and forth before the king.

Then King Solomon said, "Each of you says that the living child is hers and that the dead child belongs to the other one." He sent for a soldier and said, "Cut the living child in two and give each woman half of it."

The real mother was full of love for her son. She said to the king, "Please, Your Majesty, don't kill the child! Give it to her!" But the other woman said, "Don't give it to either of us. Let it be cut in two."

Then Solomon said, "Don't kill the child! Give it to the first woman. She is its real mother."

The people of Israel heard how King Solomon had settled the quarrel. They all had great respect for him. They knew that God had given him such wisdom.

God gave Solomon much wisdom and knowledge.

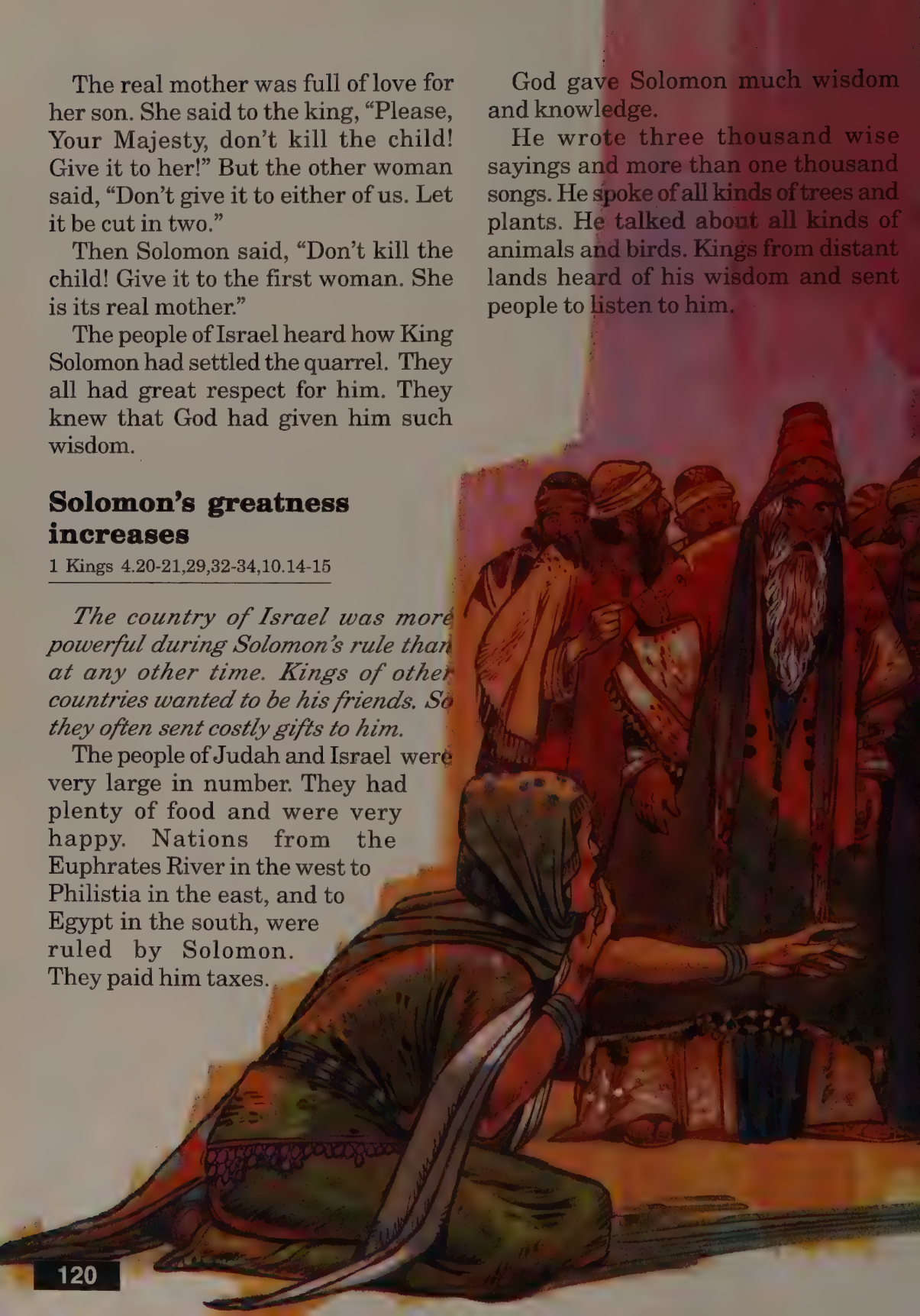
He wrote three thousand wise sayings and more than one thousand songs. He spoke of all kinds of trees and plants. He talked about all kinds of animals and birds. Kings from distant lands heard of his wisdom and sent people to listen to him.

Solomon's greatness increases

1 Kings 4.20-21,29,32-34,10.14-15

The country of Israel was more powerful during Solomon's rule than at any other time. Kings of other countries wanted to be his friends. So they often sent costly gifts to him.

The people of Judah and Israel were very large in number. They had plenty of food and were very happy. Nations from the Euphrates River in the west to Philistia in the east, and to Egypt in the south, were ruled by Solomon. They paid him taxes.



Every year King Solomon received over twenty tons of gold. He also received tax money from merchants. He earned money from trading with the Arabian kings too.

Solomon's great task

1 Kings 6.1,7,15,19,21,22,38

King David had one great wish, which he could not carry out. This was to build a Temple for God in Jerusalem. The Covenant Box had been kept in a large tent known as the "Tent of the Lord's Presence". In this tent the Israelites had worshipped God as they travelled through the desert on their way to Canaan. The tent was now at Shiloh, the place where Samuel had heard God speak. David had taken the Covenant Box from the tent to Jerusalem.

David knew that a tent was not the best place to worship God. So he had bought the best piece of land in Jerusalem to build a Temple. He began to collect the building materials. Then God told him to leave the building work to his son Solomon.

King Solomon made a contract with King Hiram of Tyre. He was to supply all the cedar and fine wood plus carpenters for the Temple. In return, he gave King Hiram tons of wheat and barrels of olive oil every year. Thousands of men were forced by King Solomon to cut and bring the large stones and the wood for the Temple.

During the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began work on the Temple.

The stones for the Temple had been carefully cut at the quarry.

The inside walls were covered with cedar wood from the floor to the ceiling. The floor was made of pine wood. In the rear of the Temple an inner room was built. The Covenant Box was to be placed there.

Gold chains were placed across the big door of the inner room. It was also covered with gold. All the inside walls of the Temple were covered with gold, as well as the altar in the Most Holy Place.

At last, Solomon completed the Temple exactly as it had been planned. It took seven years to build it.

Solomon's royal visitor

1 Kings 10.1-9

The queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame. She came all the way to Jerusalem to find answers to difficult questions from the king. She brought with her a large number of helpers. She had camels loaded with spices, jewels, and much gold. She asked the king very many questions. He answered them all. There was nothing too difficult for him. The queen of Sheba learned how wise Solomon was. She saw the palace he had built. She saw the food that was served at his table. She saw the houses his officers lived in. She was amazed to see so many servants all dressed in special uniforms. She was also amazed to see the worship in the Temple. The queen of Sheba was full of wonder at all that she saw in the

palace and in the Temple. She said to the king, "What I heard in my own country about you and your wisdom is true! But I couldn't believe it until I came and saw it all for myself. Your wisdom and wealth are much more than what I had been told. How fortunate are your wives! How fortunate are your servants who can always listen to your wise words! Praise the LORD your God! He has shown how pleased he is with you by making you king of Israel. Because of his eternal love for Israel, he has made you their ruler."

GOD'S PROPHETS SPEAK OUT

As Solomon got older, he began to allow foreign gods to be worshipped in Israel. After his death this happened even more. A war among the people divided the country. The larger part in the north kept the name Israel. The smaller southern part was called Judah, named after one of the tribes. Most kings of Judah and Israel did not care about God's laws. They even encouraged the Israelites to worship idols. God's prophets were very unhappy about this. They warned that great trouble would come. Sometimes the king and people listened, but they often forgot very quickly!

Elijah, the man of God

1 Kings 17:1-16

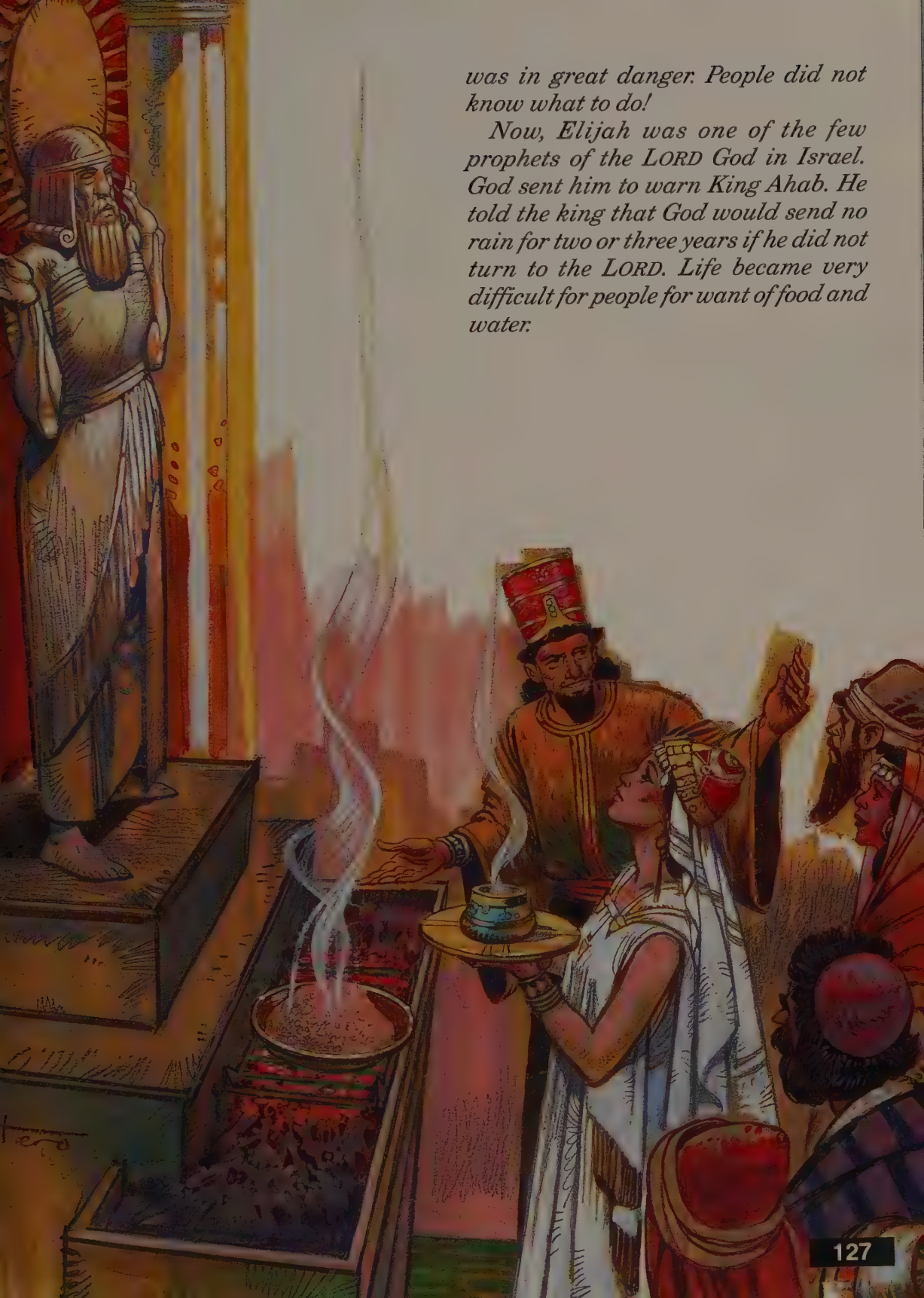
Then the LORD said to Elijah: "Now go and live in Zarephath. I have asked a widow in that town to look after you." When Elijah reached Zarephath, he saw a widow picking up firewood. He said to the woman: "Please give me a drink of water." As she was going to get water, he said: "Please bring me some bread too."

She replied: "I don't have any flour or oil at home, I swear. All I have is a little of flour and oil for my son and myself. I was picking up firewood to make food for our last meal. After that we were going to starve."

"Don't worry," Elijah said to her. "Go and prepare bread for me first. Then you will have enough for you and your son. The LORD God of Israel says that you will have flour and oil to make bread until he sends rain."

The widow went home and did as Elijah had told her. All the three of them had enough flour and oil for many days.

Ahab was one of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. Things got very bad during his reign. He married Jezebel from another country. Jezebel worshipped Baal, a false god. She wanted all the people in Israel to do the same. She became very powerful. She forced Ahab to build a temple for her god. She brought many prophets and priests of Baal to Israel. She made trouble for the prophets of the LORD God and had some of them killed. For a time anyone who worshipped God



was in great danger. People did not know what to do!

Now, Elijah was one of the few prophets of the LORD God in Israel. God sent him to warn King Ahab. He told the king that God would send no rain for two or three years if he did not turn to the LORD. Life became very difficult for people for want of food and water.

Elijah calls down fire

1 Kings 18.20-40

The LORD kept his man Elijah alive at this time of famine near a spring. Crows called ravens brought him food every day. Elijah drank water from the spring. But soon the spring dried up.

Ahab called together all the Israelites and the prophets of Baal to meet at Mount Carmel. Elijah went up to the people and said, "How much longer will you take to make up your minds? If the LORD is God, worship him. But if Baal is God, worship him!" The people did not say a word. Then Elijah said, "I am the only prophet of the LORD still left, but there are 450 prophets of Baal. Bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal kill one and cut it in pieces. Put the pieces on firewood, but don't light the fire. I will do the same with the other bull. Then let the prophets of Baal pray to their god, and I will pray to the LORD. The one who answers by sending fire is the true God." The people agreed this was a good idea.

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "There are so many of you. So you be first. Choose a bull and prepare it. Pray to your god, but don't set fire to the wood."

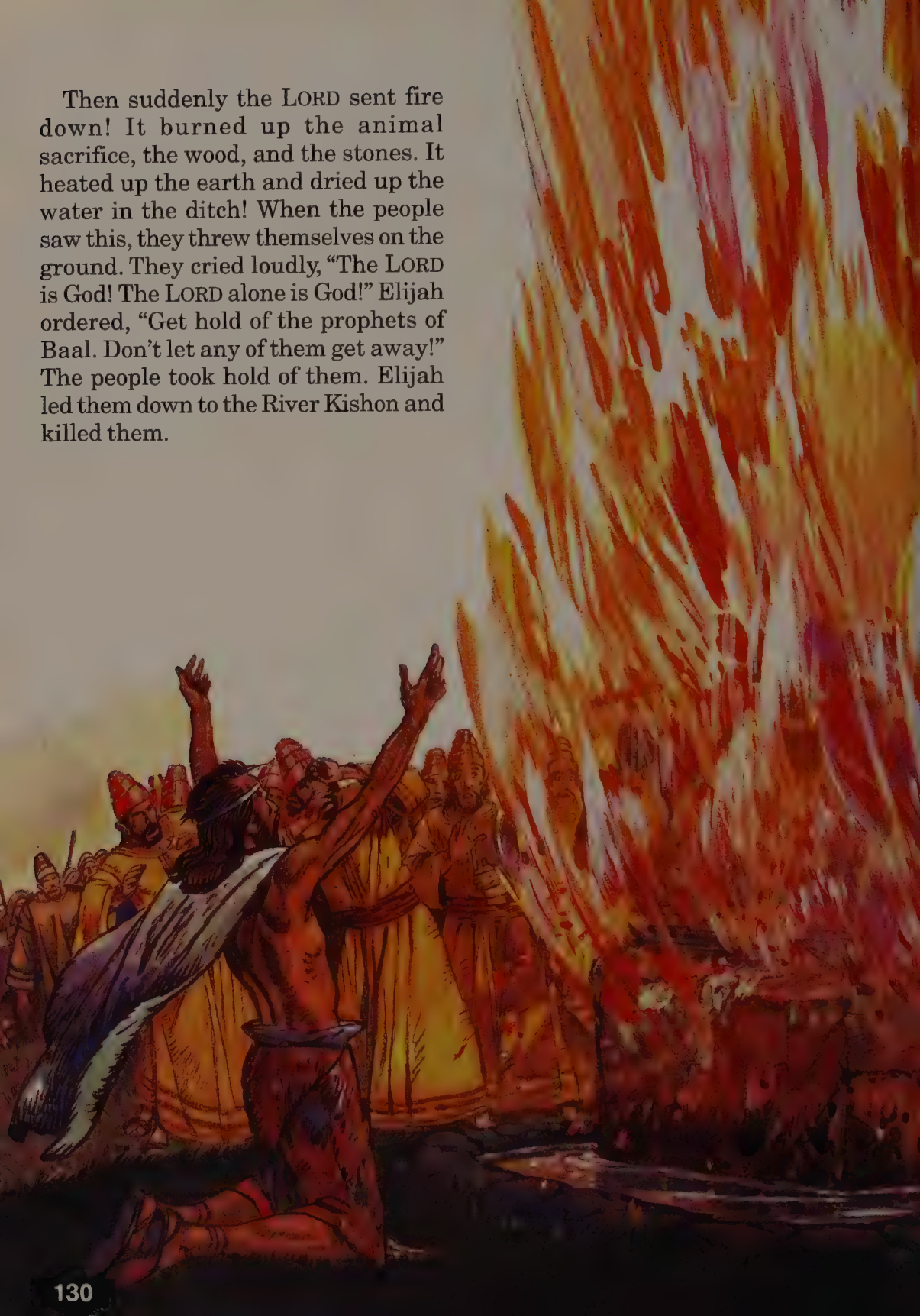
So they built an altar. Then they took the first bull and got it ready for the sacrifice. They prayed to Baal until noon. They shouted, "Answer us, Baal!" and kept dancing around the altar. But no answer came!

At noon Elijah started making fun of them, "Pray louder! He is a god! Maybe he is sitting idle or is resting! Maybe he is busy! Maybe he has gone off on a trip! Or maybe he is sleeping! You must wake him up!" So the prophets prayed louder. They cut themselves until blood flowed. This was often the way they worshipped Baal. They kept on acting wildly until the middle of the afternoon. But Baal did not answer! Not a sound was heard!

Then Elijah said to the people, "Come closer to me!" And they all gathered around him. He repaired the altar of the LORD, because it had been torn down by Jezebel's men. He took twelve stones, one for each of the twelve tribes, named after the sons of Jacob. With these stones he rebuilt the altar for the worship of the LORD. He dug a ditch around it. Then he put the firewood on the altar. He cut the bull in pieces, and laid them on the wood. He said, "Fill four buckets with water. Pour it on the meat and the wood." They did so. Then he said, "Do it again." And they did. "Do it a third time," he said. And they did! The water ran down around the altar and filled the ditch.

It was now time for the afternoon sacrifice. Elijah went near the altar and prayed, "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, show everyone now that you are the God of Israel. Show these people that I am your servant and am doing all this at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me! I want this people to know that you are the LORD God. May they know that you are bringing them back to yourself."

Then suddenly the LORD sent fire down! It burned up the animal sacrifice, the wood, and the stones. It heated up the earth and dried up the water in the ditch! When the people saw this, they threw themselves on the ground. They cried loudly, "The LORD is God! The LORD alone is God!" Elijah ordered, "Get hold of the prophets of Baal. Don't let any of them get away!" The people took hold of them. Elijah led them down to the River Kishon and killed them.



Elijah waits for rain

1 Kings 18.41-46

Then Elijah said to King Ahab, "Now, go and eat. I hear the sound of heavy rain." While Ahab went to eat, Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel. Elijah sat with his head between his knees. He said to his servant, "Go and look towards the sea."

The servant went and returned saying, "I didn't see anything!" Seven times Elijah told him to go and look. The seventh time he returned and said, "I saw a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, coming up from the sea!"

Elijah ordered his servant, "Go and tell King Ahab to drive back home quickly in his chariot before the rain stops him!"

In a little while, the sky was covered with dark clouds. The wind began to blow. Heavy rain began to fall. Ahab hurried back to Jezreel in his chariot. The power of the LORD came on Elijah. He fastened his clothes tight round his waist, and ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

Elijah hears a whisper

1 Kings 19.1-18

King Ahab told his wife Jezebel everything that Elijah had done. Ahab told her how Elijah had put all the prophets of Baal to death. So she sent a message to Elijah, "May the gods strike me dead if I don't have you killed by this time tomorrow."

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life with his servant. He left the servant at Beersheba in Judah and walked a whole day into the desert. Then he stopped and sat down in the shade of a tree. He wished he could die. "It's too much, LORD," he prayed. "Take away my life. I might as well be dead!"

Elijah fell asleep under the tree. Suddenly the LORD's angel touched him and said, "Wake up and eat!" He looked around and saw a loaf of bread and a jar of water near his head. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel returned and woke him up a second time. The angel said, "Get up and eat, or the trip will be too much for you." Elijah got up. He ate and drank. The food gave him enough strength to walk 40 days to Sinai, the holy mountain. There he went into a cave to spend the night.

Suddenly the LORD spoke to him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"

He answered, "LORD God Almighty, I have always served you, you alone. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you. They have torn down your altars, and killed all your prophets. I am the only one left. Now they are trying to kill me!"

"Go out and stand before me on top of the mountain," the LORD said. Then the LORD passed by and sent a very strong wind. It split the hills and broke the rocks into pieces! But the LORD was not in the wind. The wind stopped blowing, and then there was an earthquake! But the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire! But the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire a voice spoke in a whisper!

When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his robe. He went out and stood at the opening of the cave. Again the voice asked, "Elijah, why are you here?"

He answered, "LORD God Almighty, I have always served you, you alone. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you. They have torn down your altars. They have killed all your prophets. I am the only one left. Now they are trying to kill me!"

The LORD said, "Go to Damascus through the desert. When you get to the city, pour oil on Hazael and make him king of Syria. Then pour oil on Jehu son of Nimshi and make him king over Israel. Next pour oil on Elisha son of Shaphat. He will take

your place as prophet. I will leave seven thousand people alive in Israel. All of them are true to me. They have not bowed to Baal or kissed his idol!"

Elijah finds Elisha

1 Kings 19.19-21

Soon Elijah left there and found a young man Elisha ploughing with a team of two oxen. There were eleven other teams ahead of him. He was with the last one. Elijah took off his robe and put it on Elisha. Elisha then left his oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me say good-bye to my parents. Then I will go with you."

Elijah answered, "All right, go back. I'm not stopping you!"

Then Elisha killed his team of oxen and cooked the meat using the wooden yoke for the fire. He gave the meat to the people. They ate it. Then he followed Elijah as his helper.

Elijah warns King Ahab

1 Kings 21.1-24,27-29

Like David, Ahab had to learn that kings of Israel were expected to keep the Law. God was merciful, even to wicked Ahab, when he was truly sorry for what he had done.

Near King Ahab's palace in Jezreel, there was a vineyard owned by a man named Naboth. One day Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard. It is close to my palace. I want to use the land for a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard for it or, if you wish, I will pay you the right price."

"I got this vineyard from my father," Naboth replied. "The LORD would not want me to let you have it!"

Ahab went home. He was sad and angry over Naboth's reply to him. He lay down on his bed with his face to the wall, and would not eat. His wife Jezebel went to him and asked, "Why are you so unhappy? Why won't you eat?"

He answered, "It is because of that Naboth. I offered to buy his vineyard or give him another one for it. He told me, 'I will not give it to you'."

"Well, are you the king or aren't you?" Jezebel replied. "Get out of bed, cheer up, and eat. I will get you Naboth's vineyard!"

Then she wrote some letters in King Ahab's name. She sealed them with the king's seal, and sent them to all the important people of Jezreel. The letters said, "Call a day of fasting. Bring the people together, and give Naboth the place of honour. Let wicked men bring charges against him. Let them say that he has cursed God and the king. Then take him out of the city and stone him to death."

Jezebel's command was obeyed! Naboth was stoned to death. Then a message was sent to Jezebel, "Naboth has been put to death!"

As soon as she got the message, she said to Ahab, "Naboth is dead! Now go and take over the vineyard which he refused to sell to you." At once Ahab went to the vineyard to take it for himself.

Then the LORD said to Elijah the prophet, "Go to King Ahab of Samaria. You will find him in Naboth's vineyard, ready to make it his own. Ask him, 'Are you taking over his property after murdering him?' Tell him what I say: 'At the very place that the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will lick up your blood! I the LORD have spoken.'"

When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "How is it that I am meeting my enemy here?"

Elijah answered. "Everything you do is always wrong in the LORD's sight! So the LORD says to you, 'I will bring great trouble to you. I will destroy you and every man and boy in your family, young and old alike.'"

Elijah's words made Ahab truly sorry for his wicked deed. He put on sackcloth and went without food for some time to show his regret.

The LORD said to the prophet Elijah, "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? So I will not bring real trouble on him during his lifetime. Trouble will come on all Ahab's family during his son's lifetime."

Elijah is taken to heaven

2 Kings 2.1-13

Elisha wanted to be a great prophet like Elijah.

The time came for the LORD to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah set out from Gilgal with Elisha. On the way, Elijah said to Elisha, "Now stay here. The LORD has ordered me to go to Bethel." But Elisha answered, "In the name of the living LORD, I will not leave you!" So they went on to Bethel.

Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Now stay here. The LORD has ordered me to go to Jericho." But Elisha answered, "In the name of the living LORD, I will not leave you!" So they went on to Jericho.

A group of prophets who lived there went to Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Yes, I know," Elisha answered. "But let's not talk about it."

Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Now stay here. The LORD has ordered me to go to the Jordan River."

But Elisha answered, "In the name of the living LORD, I will not leave you!" So they went on together.

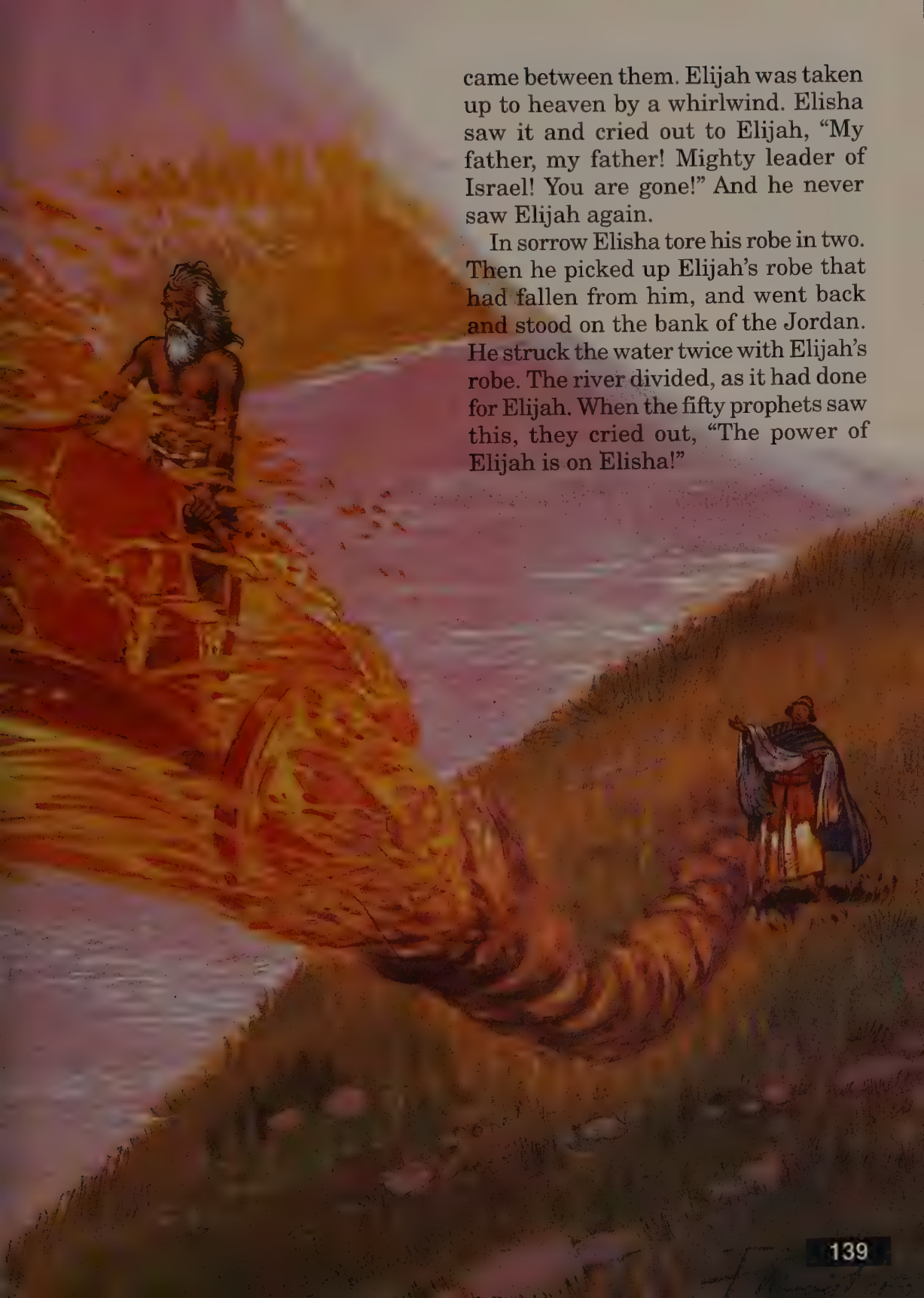
Fifty of the prophets followed them to the Jordan. Elijah and Elisha stopped by the river, and the fifty prophets stood a short distance away.

Then Elijah took off his robe, rolled it up, and struck the water with it. The water divided, and he and Elisha crossed to the other side on dry ground. There, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what you want me to do for you before the LORD takes me away."

"Let me have the power that will make me a great prophet like you," Elisha answered.

"You are asking for a difficult thing," Elijah replied. "But you will get it if you see me when God takes me away from you. If you don't see me, you won't get it."

They kept talking as they walked on. Then suddenly something like a shining chariot pulled by horses of fire



came between them. Elijah was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind. Elisha saw it and cried out to Elijah, "My father, my father! Mighty leader of Israel! You are gone!" And he never saw Elijah again.

In sorrow Elisha tore his robe in two. Then he picked up Elijah's robe that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He struck the water twice with Elijah's robe. The river divided, as it had done for Elijah. When the fifty prophets saw this, they cried out, "The power of Elijah is on Elisha!"

Elisha and a poor widow

2 Kings 4.1-7

A widow went to Elisha. She told him that her husband, a prophet, had died. She said, "He was a God-fearing man. But he owed a man some money. Now that man has come to take away my two sons. He will make them slaves."

Elisha asked, "What do you have in your house?"

She answered, "Nothing at all, except a small jar of oil."

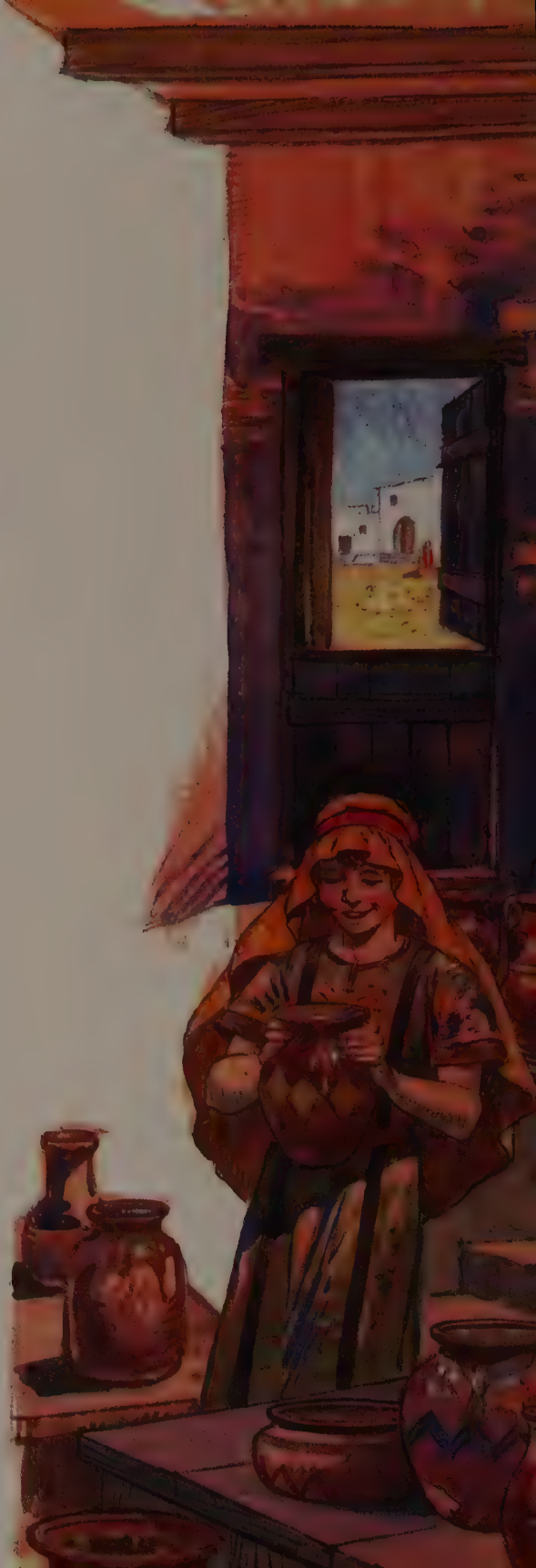
"Go to your neighbours and borrow as many empty jars as you can," Elisha told her. "Then you and your sons go into the house, close the door, and start pouring the oil into the jars. Set each one aside as soon as it is full."

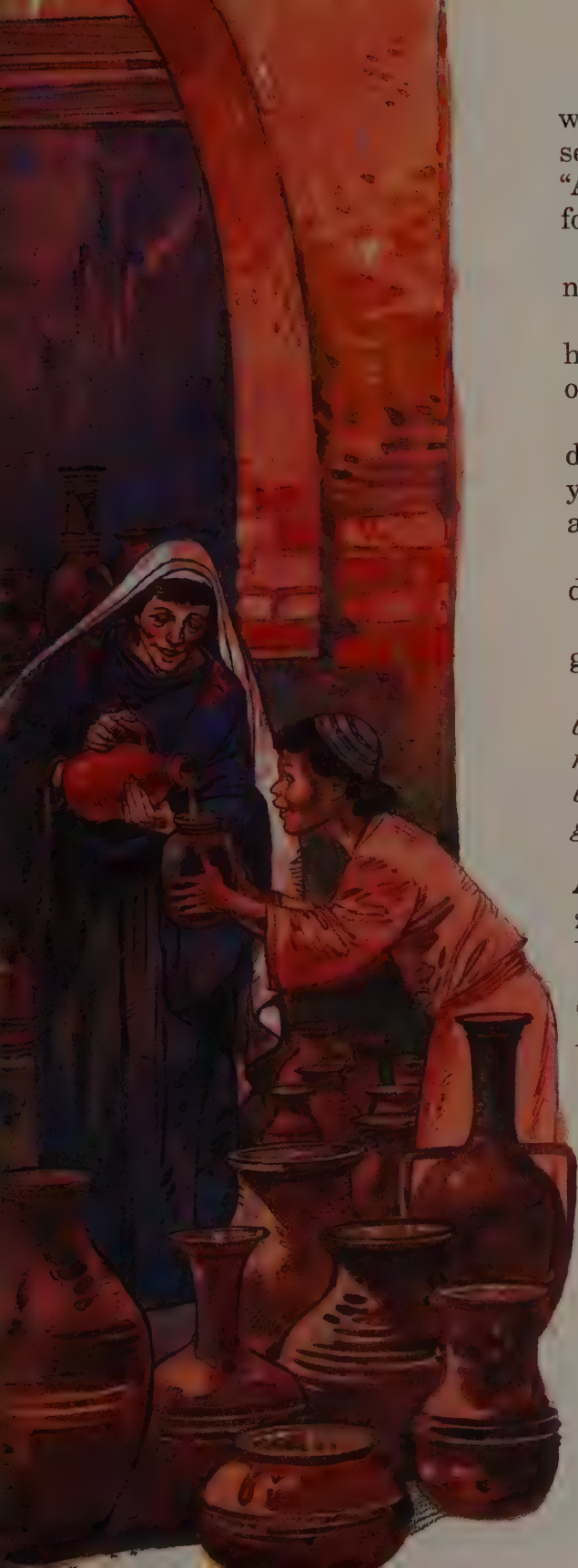
The woman and the sons did as the prophet Elisha had told her. When they had filled all the jars, the oil stopped flowing. She went back to Elisha. He said, "Sell the oil and pay all your debts. There will be enough left over for you and your sons to live on."

Elisha and a rich woman

2 Kings 4.8-37

One day Elisha went north to Shunem. A rich woman lived there. She invited Elisha for a meal. From then on, every time he went to Shunem, he would have his meals at her house. She said to her husband, "I am sure he is a holy man. Let's build a small room on the roof and put a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp in it. He can stay there whenever he visits us."





Elisha returned to Shunem and went up to his room to rest. He told his servant Gehazi to meet the woman. "Ask her what I can do for her in return for all her help to us."

The woman answered, "I have all I need."

Later Gehazi said to Elisha, "She has no child, and her husband is an old man."

Elisha called her. As she stood in the doorway, he told her, "By this time next year you will be holding a son in your arms."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Please, sir, don't lie to me. You are a man of God!"

But, just as Elisha had said, she gave birth to a son the following year.

Some years later, her little boy became very ill and died on his mother's lap. But Elisha brought him back to life through the power God had given him.

A slave girl speaks for God

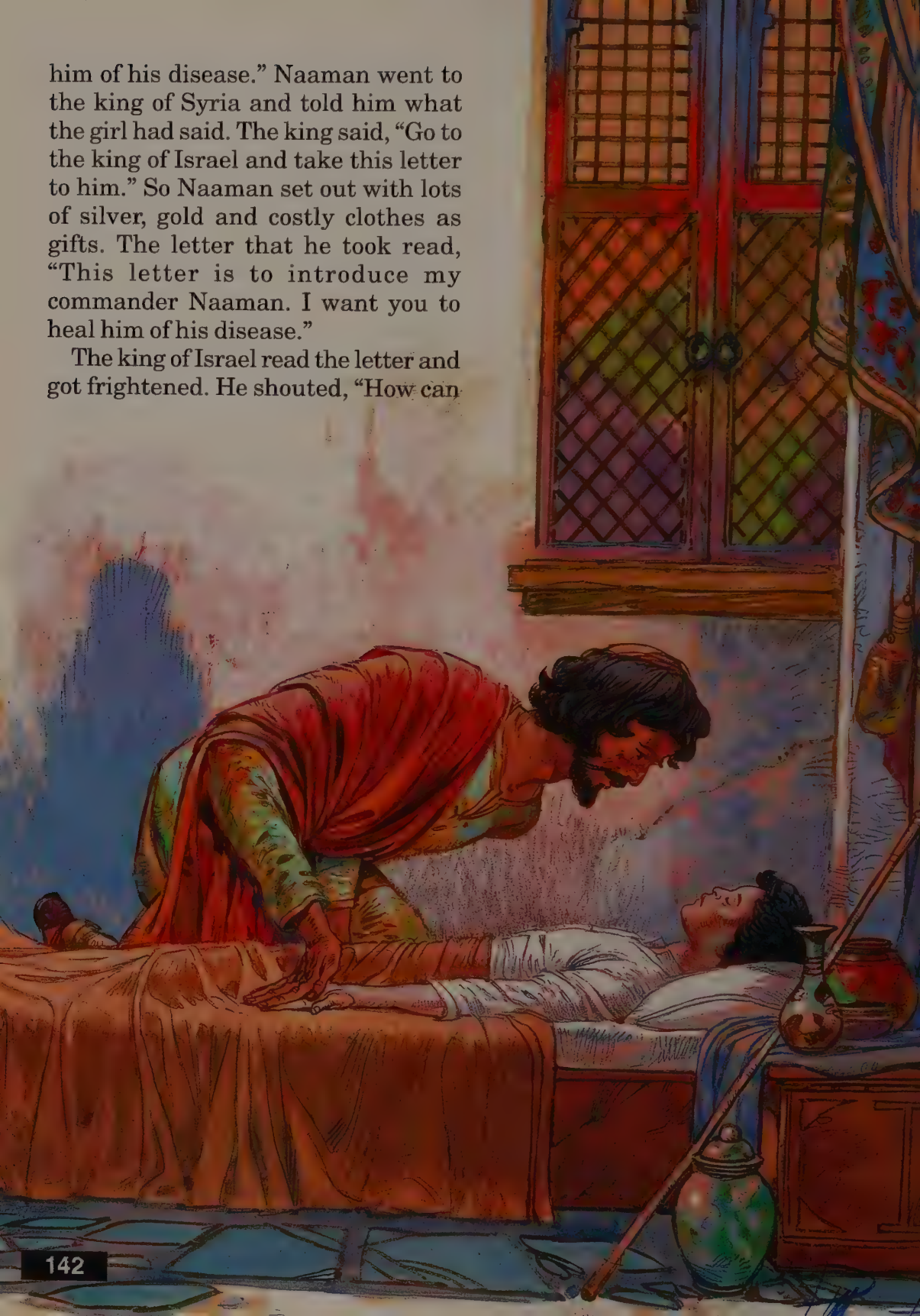
2 Kings 5.1-14

This story shows that God cared about other people as well as the Israelites.

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He was a great soldier. The king of Syria was proud of Naaman. The LORD had helped him and his soldiers to win battles against Israel. But he suffered from a terrible skin disease. In one of their fights against Israel, the Syrians had carried off a little Israelite girl. She became a servant of Naaman's wife. One day she said to her mistress, "I wish my master could go to the prophet of Samaria! He would heal

him of his disease." Naaman went to the king of Syria and told him what the girl had said. The king said, "Go to the king of Israel and take this letter to him." So Naaman set out with lots of silver, gold and costly clothes as gifts. The letter that he took read, "This letter is to introduce my commander Naaman. I want you to heal him of his disease."

The king of Israel read the letter and got frightened. He shouted, "How can



the king of Syria expect me to heal this man? Does he think that I am God? Do I have power over life and death? It seems he is trying to start a quarrel with me!"

When the prophet Elisha heard what had happened, he sent word to the king, "Why are you so upset? Send the man to me. I'll show him that there is a prophet in Israel!"

So Naaman went with his horses and chariot. He stopped at the gate to Elisha's house. Elisha sent out a servant saying, "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then you will be healed."But Naaman left in a rage. "I thought he would come out and pray to the LORD his God for me." he said "I thought he would wave his hand over my body and heal me! Aren't the rivers back in my country better than any river in Israel? I could wash in them and be healed!"

Now his servants went up to him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told

you to do something difficult, you would have done it. Now why can't you just wash yourself as he said, and be healed?" So Naaman went down to the River Jordan. He dipped himself in it seven times as Elisha told him. He was now completely healed! His body became strong, and he looked as fresh as a child. He returned to Elisha with all his men and said, "Now I know that there is no other god than the God of Israel!"

A TRUE PROPHET

Isaiah ready to speak for God

Isaiah 6.1-8

Isaiah was an Israelite. He knew that no one was good enough to stand before God. One day, in 739 B.C. when he was in the Temple in Jerusalem, he had a vision of the LORD. This made him bold enough to speak for God to his people.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD. He was sitting high up on his throne. His long robe filled

the whole Temple. Around him stood flaming creatures. Each of them had six wings. Each creature covered its face with two wings and its body with two. It used the other two for flying. The creatures were calling out to each other:

"Holy, holy, holy!
The LORD Almighty is holy!
His glory is everywhere!"

Their voices shook the Temple, and it was filled with smoke.

Then I said, "No hope for me! Every word I say is sinful. I live among a people whose words are also sinful. Yet, with my own eyes, I have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!"

Then one of the creatures flew down to me. It held a piece of burning coal taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. It touched my lips with the burning coal and said, "This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone. Your sins are forgiven!"

Then I heard the LORD say, "Whom shall I send? Who will be my messenger?"

I answered, "I will go! Send me!"

Isaiah's words of peace

Isaiah 11.1-9

In the midst of troubles, Isaiah looked forward to a time of real peace. He knew that one day a special descendant of David would come. He would be the one sent by God to save his people. Finally, Jesus was born in the family line of King David. But he was a different kind of king, as you will read in the New Testament.

The royal line of David is like a tree that has been cut down. Just as new branches grow from a stump, so a new king will arise from among David's family.

He will be glad to obey the LORD.
He will do what is right for the poor.
He will rule his people in the right and true way.
Wolves and sheep will live together in peace.
Leopards will lie down with young goats.

Lambs and lion cubs will feed together.
Even a child will take care of them.
Cows and bears will eat together.
Calves and young bears will lie down in peace.
Lions will eat straw as cattle do.
Even a baby will not be harmed if it plays near a deadly snake.
On Zion, God's holy hill,
there will be nothing harmful or evil.
The land will be full of
the knowledge of the LORD,
even as the seas are full of water.

Isaiah's message to King Hezekiah

Isaiah 36.1-2,13-21;37.5-7,9-11,14-22,30-38

About 100 years had passed after the time of Elisha. The country was already divided into two. Prophet Isaiah lived in the southern kingdom. The king of Assyria had captured the northern kingdom of Israel. Now he wanted to capture the southern kingdom of Judah. To stop the Assyrians from attacking Jerusalem, King Ahaz paid them silver and gold from the Temple. This was wrong! When Hezekiah became king, he stopped the payments. King Sennacherib of Assyria was angry, and led a large army to Jerusalem.

Hezekiah was king of Judah. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, attacked the cities of Judah and captured them. Then he sent his commander to Jerusalem with a large army to ask King Hezekiah to surrender.

The commander stood up and shouted to the people in Hebrew, "Listen to the message of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. King Hezekiah can't save you. He is fooling you! No god has ever saved any nation from the king of Assyria. What makes you think the LORD can save Jerusalem?"

The people kept quiet. King Hezekiah had ordered them not to answer back.

Now the king sent word to the prophet Isaiah about the Assyrian commander's threat. Isaiah sent this answer to the king, "The LORD tells you not to be afraid of the Assyrians. They say that the LORD cannot save you. But the Assyrians will hear some bad news and go home. There the LORD will have Sennacherib killed."

Word reached the Assyrians that the Egyptian army, led by the king of Ethiopia, was coming to attack them. When the king of Assyria heard this, he sent a letter to King Hezekiah. It read, "Your god has told you that I can't defeat you. But don't be fooled. You know that Assyrian kings can destroy any country. Do you think you can escape?"

King Hezekiah read the letter. Then he went to the Temple, placed the letter before the LORD and prayed, "Almighty LORD, God of Israel, you alone are God. You rule all the kingdoms of the world. You created the earth and the sky. Now, LORD,

hear us and look at what is happening to us. Listen to all the insulting words of Sennacherib against you, the living God."

Then Isaiah sent a message to King Hezekiah that the LORD had answered his prayer. This is what the LORD says to the Assyrians, "The city of Jerusalem laughs at you, Sennacherib. You must know that you have insulted me, the holy God of Israel."

Isaiah also said to King Hezekiah,

"Here is a sign of what will happen. This year and the next, you will have only wild grain to eat. But the third year, you will be able to plant grain and harvest it. You will also plant vines and eat grapes. People will stay on in Judah and in Jerusalem. The LORD Almighty has planned to make this happen.

"This is what the LORD says about the Assyrian king, He will not enter this city or shoot a single arrow against it. None of his soldiers will come near the city. He will go back by the same road he came. I, the LORD, have spoken. For the sake of my name and my promise to David, I will protect this city."

An angel of the LORD went to the Assyrian camp and killed one lakh eightyfive thousand soldiers. At dawn the next day they were all dead! Then the Assyrian King Sennacherib left quickly for Nineveh. One day he was worshipping in the temple of his god. Two of his sons killed him with their swords and quickly escaped.

Isaiah's words of hope

Isaiah 40.1-8

God encouraged his people through his prophet Isaiah. Many had been taken as prisoners to Babylon. They would soon be released as their punishment was over. They could return to their own land. A dangerous and difficult desert had to be crossed. But they could trust God to help them.

Someone shouts,
"Get a road ready in the desert for the LORD!
Dig the mountains and level up the country roads.
Make a road in the desert for our God.
Then he will show his glory to all people.
This is the promise of God."
Someone shouts,
"Speak this news from God!"
I ask,
What news shall I speak?"
The voice answered,
"God says,
'All people are like grass or flowers.
I send the wind, and the grass dries up.
The flowers too fade and die.
But my word will last forever.'"

The Saviour is promised

Isaiah 53.7-12

Isaiah wrote these words hundreds of years before Jesus the Saviour suffered and died for our sins. God

had shown Isaiah what would happen. The people at that time could not understand it. But today we can!

They were cruel to him,
but he never said a word.
He was like a lamb about to be killed,
like a sheep when people remove its wool,
but he never said a word.
They put him in prison and sent him to die.
They put him to death for all of us,
no one cared for him anymore.
They sent him to his grave like an evil man,
though he had done no wrong.
The LORD says,
"I allowed him to suffer and die,
for it would bring forgiveness to many.
Many would be blessed through him.

He will live forever,
after he completes my plan.
I am so happy with my faithful servant,
for he suffered punishment in place of others,
and I will forgive them for their wrongs.
He has the joy that he suffered for others.
So this is what my faithful servant has done.
He died like an evil man for others.
He gave his life for sinners,
and prayed that I may forgive them."

A YOUNG KING SPEAKS FOR GOD

The Book of the Law is found

2 Kings 22.1-13

The rulers before King Josiah were very wicked. When Josiah came to rule in 640 B.C. He did his best to follow the good example of King David. Then a wonderful thing happened.

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. He ruled in Jerusalem for 31 years. Josiah did what was pleasing to the LORD.

He had been king for 18 years when he sent the court secretary Shaphan to the Temple.

There High Priest Hilkiah told Shaphan that he had found the Book of the Law in the Temple. Hilkiah gave him the book to read. Later, Shaphan went back to the king and reported, "I have here a book that Hilkiah gave me." He read it aloud to the king.

When the king heard the book being read, he was very upset. He gave this order to Hilkiah the priest and to other important men, "Go and ask the LORD about the teachings in this book. Do this for me and for all the people of Judah. The LORD is angry with us because of our ancestors who had not obeyed the teachings of this book!"

What the Book said

Deuteronomy 6.1-9,12-15

The LORD God had given to Moses many commands for the people to obey. Many kings before King Josiah had failed to teach their people God's laws.

"You and your children must honour the LORD your God and obey his laws all your life. You will live in the promised land a long time, if you obey him. You will become a powerful nation. In that land there is plenty of everything for you.

"Israel, remember this! The LORD is God, and he is the only God. Love the LORD your God in everything that you think and do. Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road. Talk about them when you are resting and when you are working. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

"Be sure that you do not forget the LORD. He brought you out of Egypt where you were slaves. Honour the LORD your God, worship only him. Make your promises in his name alone. Do not worship other gods as the people around you do. The LORD your God is with you. You must love him only."

Josiah renews faith in the book of the law

2 Kings 23.1-6

King Josiah called all the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. They went to the Temple together with the priests and the prophets. All the people, rich and poor, came too. The king read aloud all God's commands from the book which had just been found in the Temple. Then he stood by the royal pillar. He made a promise to the LORD to obey him. He wanted to obey everything written in the book. The people also promised to obey the commands.

Then Josiah ordered the priests and their helpers to throw out everything that was used in the worship of Baal, Asherah, and the stars. These were burnt outside the city near the Kidron Valley. The ashes were sent to Bethel.

THE PROPHETS SPEAK AGAINST EVIL

We will now read how the prophets Amos, Micah and Hosea spoke out strongly against evil. They lived during 740-690 B.C. They said that God wanted his people to change their ways and treat each other fairly. If they did not live this way, God would not be pleased with them. Offering sacrifices would then be useless.

God hates evil

Amos 5.14-15,21-24

There was great prosperity in Israel during the time of Prophet Amos. But

Amos saw that the prosperity was limited only to the wealthy. The poor suffered at the hands of the rich. So he called for justice.

Try to do what is right, not what is evil. Then you will live. The LORD God Almighty will really be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good. Be fair in the courts. Perhaps the LORD will be kind to his people who are still alive.

The LORD says, "I hate all your festivals. I cannot stand them! Don't bring me any offerings or animal sacrifices. Stop your noisy songs. Let justice flow like a stream, and goodness like a river that never goes dry."

God loves his people

Hosea 11.1-4

Hosea was another prophet who talked strongly against people being unfair. Here he speaks of God's loving kindness towards his people.

The LORD says,
"When Israel was a child, I loved him.
I called him out of Egypt as my son.
But the more I called to him,
the more he turned away from me.
My people sacrificed to Baal,
and burnt incense to idols.
They forgot that I taught them to walk,
and took them up in my arms.
I drew them to me with kindness and love.
I picked them up and held them to my cheek.
I bent down and fed them.

God likes goodness

Micah 6.6-8

The Prophet Micah lived after Amos. He reminded the people of God's goodness and what they should do.

What should I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Should I sacrifice my best animals to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or rivers of oil? Should I offer him my eldest child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. Do what is right to others. Always be kind to all. Live humbly, trusting God.

God wants obedience

Psalm 15

The Psalms are songs of praise, thanksgiving or prayer. They were written by different people at different times. These songs were used by the people of Israel in their personal and public worship. This Psalm says almost the same things the prophets had told the people.

He obeys God in everything,
and always does what is right.
He does not hurt others with his words,
and does not tell lies about them.
He does no wrong to his friends,
and neither gossips nor speaks evil of his neighbours.
He does not think well of the ungodly,
but honours those who obey the LORD.
He will always keep his promise,

no matter how much it hurts
him.
He will lend money to the needy
without profit,
and will not take bribes.
He who does all these things
will always have God's favour.

A YOUNG PROPHET

God calls Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1.4-10

King Josiah had been serious about renewing the agreement with God. But from Jeremiah's writings we know that most of the people did not follow him. Jeremiah had a difficult message to give them.

The LORD said to me, "Before I gave you life, I chose you to be a prophet to the nations."

I answered, "O LORD, great King, I don't know how to speak! I am too young."

But the LORD said, "Do not say that you are too young. You must go wherever I send you. You must tell the people everything I command you to say. Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you. I will keep you safe. I, the LORD, have spoken!"

Then the LORD reached out, touched my lips, and said to me, "Listen, I am giving you the words you must speak. Today I have put you in charge of nations and kingdoms. You will pull them up and tear them down. You will destroy and overthrow them. But you will help them build and plant."

God's warning

Jeremiah 7.1-10

Many people believed that they were quite safe in Jerusalem. This was the place of the Temple. They were sure that God would not allow it to fall into enemy hands. Jeremiah knew that God protected only those who obeyed his laws. Living in the "holy city" was not enough! Living holy lives was what God wanted.

The LORD asked me to go and stand at the gate of the Temple. The people of Judah were going in to worship. He wanted me to tell them what their God, the LORD Almighty, had to say to them:

"Change the way you are living and the things you are doing. If you do, I will let you go on living here. Do not be fooled by believing, 'We are safe! This is the LORD's Temple!'

"Change your ways. Be fair to one another. Stop being unkind to strangers, orphans, and widows. Stop killing good people. Stop worshipping other gods, for that will ruin your lives. If you change, I will let you go on living here. This is the land which I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.

"You are trusting in lies! You steal and murder! You are not true to your wives! You sacrifice to Baal! You worship gods that you had not known before. You do the things I hate."

God's forgiving love

Jeremiah 31.31-34

Jeremiah saw that the people of Israel were going to suffer. They had

broken their agreement with God. But he also could see a time coming when God would make a new agreement with his people.

The LORD says, "I led my people by the hand out of Egypt. Yet they did not keep the agreement. This is how I will make the new agreement with my people! I will put my laws within them and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. None will have to teach another to know the LORD. All of them will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and no longer remember their wrongs. I, the LORD, have spoken."

God punishes wrong

Jeremiah 52.3-11

For many years, different prophets had warned the people about God's punishment. But they ignored these warnings, and did not want to change their ways. King Nebuchadnezzar made the Babylonians the most powerful nation. In 587 BC, nearly 600 years before Jesus Christ was born, the Babylonians took over Jerusalem. Many were taken as captives to Babylon. Among them was King Zedekiah who was the last king of Judah.

The LORD became so angry with the people of Judah that he turned away from them.

Zedekiah turned against King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. So Nebuchadnezzar came with all his army. They set up camp around Jerusalem. Then they built walls to help them attack the city. Jerusalem was under attack for two years. Finally, the people had nothing left to eat! So they broke through the city walls. Although the Babylonians were all around the city, Zedekiah and his soldiers escaped during the night. They passed through the royal garden and got out through the gateway between the two walls. Then they fled toward the Jordan Valley. But the Babylonians chased them and captured King Zedekiah in the plains near Jericho. All his soldiers were scattered. Zedekiah was taken to King Nebuchadnezzar in the city of Riblah in the far north. There Nebuchadnezzar took him as a prisoner. Zedekiah saw his sons killed in front of him. The king also put to death the officials of Judah. After that, he had Zedekiah's eyes put out! Then he was put in chains and taken to Babylon. Zedekiah was kept in prison in Babylon until he died.

Jeremiah kept on giving God's messages. But his warnings were ignored. God's warning of severe punishment came true.

A DISOBEDIENT PROPHET

Jonah runs away

Jonah 1.1-6

God had told his prophet Jonah to go and speak his message to the people of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. This country was Israel's enemy. No wonder Jonah did not want to go there. But finally Jonah

went to Nineveh. He and his people learnt some lessons about how God loves and cares for all peoples.

One day the LORD spoke to Jonah. He said, "Go to Nineveh, that large city, and tell the people that I will punish them if they do not change their wicked ways." But Jonah wanted to get away from the LORD. So he went the opposite way. He boarded a ship from Joppa, about to go to Spain. But the LORD sent a strong wind! The storm was so strong that the ship was in danger of breaking up. The sailors were scared and cried out for help. Each one called out to his own god. Then they threw the goods into the sea and made the ship lighter. During this time Jonah was asleep in the ship's lower deck.

The captain found him there and said to him, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray to your god for help. Maybe he will feel sorry for us and save our lives."

Jonah thrown into the sea

Jonah 1.7-17;2.1,7-10

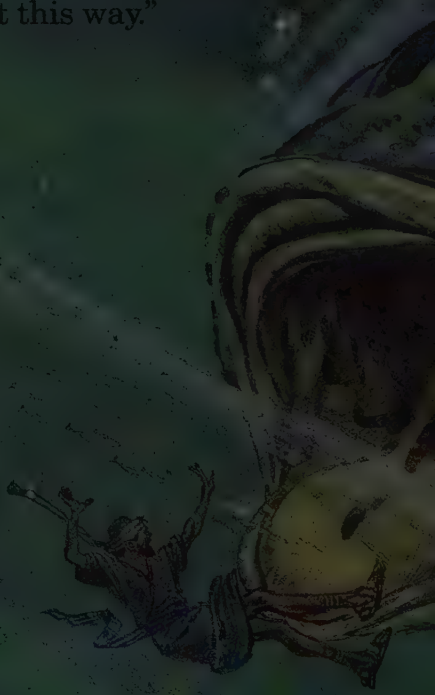
Sailors have always been noted for their strange beliefs. If there was a bad storm, they thought that their gods were angry and trying to punish someone.

The sailors said to each other, "Let's draw lots and find out who has put us into this danger." They did so, and Jonah's name was drawn. So they said to him, "Tell us! How did you get into this trouble? What are you doing here? What country are you from?"

"I am a Hebrew," Jonah answered. "I worship the LORD, the Great God, who made land and sea." Jonah went on to tell them that he was running away from the LORD. The sailors were terrified, and said to him, "That was an awful thing to do!" The storm was getting stronger all the time. So the sailors asked him, "What should we do to you to stop the storm?"

Jonah answered, "Throw me into the sea, and it will calm down. I know it is my fault that you are caught in this terrible storm."

Still the sailors tried their best to get the ship to shore. But the storm was becoming worse and worse, and they got nowhere. So they cried out, "O LORD, we pray, don't punish us with death for taking this man's life! You, O LORD, caused all this to happen. You wanted it this way."



Then they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea. It calmed down at once! This made the sailors so afraid of the LORD that they offered a sacrifice and promised to worship him. At the LORD's command, a large fish swallowed Jonah. He was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

From deep inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the LORD his God:

"O LORD, when I was losing all my strength,
I prayed to you, and you heard me.
Those who worship idols
have no faith in you.
But I will sing praises to you.
I will offer you a sacrifice,
and do what I have promised.
The LORD is the One who saves."

Then, at the LORD's command, the fish spat Jonah onto the beach.

Jonah gets a second chance

Jonah 3.1-10

Once again the LORD spoke to Jonah. "Go to Nineveh, that large city, and preach to the people the message I have given you." So Jonah obeyed the LORD and went to Nineveh. It took him three days to walk through the city. After walking a whole day, Jonah shouted, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!"

The people of Nineveh believed God's message. They decided that everyone should fast. All of them put on sackcloth to show that they had turned away from their sins.

Even the king put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes. He sent out a message to his people, "This is an order from the king and his officials: All people, all cattle and all sheep must go without food or drink. All persons and animals must put on sackcloth. People must pray with all their heart to God. They must give up their wicked ways. Perhaps God will stop being angry. Then we will not die!"

God saw what the people of Nineveh did. He saw that they had stopped doing evil things. So he did not punish them as he had said he would.

Jonah's anger and God's mercy

Jonah 4.1-11

Jonah was very unhappy that the people of Nineveh were not punished for their sins. He got angry. So he prayed, "LORD, I knew that this is just what you would do. That's why I tried my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God. You are always patient, kind, and ready not to punish people. Now then, LORD, let me die. I don't want to live anymore."

The LORD answered, "What right do you have to be angry?"

Jonah went out east of the city and sat down. He made a tent for himself and sat in its shade. He waited to see what would happen to Nineveh. Then the LORD God made a plant grow up over the tent. Jonah was so pleased with the plant, because it gave him shade during the day. But early the next day, at God's command, a worm

destroyed the plant. After sunrise, God sent a hot east wind. Jonah was about to faint from the heat of the sun. He wanted to die.

But God said to him, "What right have you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah replied, "I have every right to be angry. I am angry enough to die!"

The LORD said to him, "This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next. You didn't plant it or make it grow. Yet you feel sorry for it! How much more, then, should I feel sorry for Nineveh, that large city with thousands of innocent children, as well as many animals!"

This story shows God's forgiving love towards wicked people who turn away from their sins.

Far from home

STRONG IN FAITH

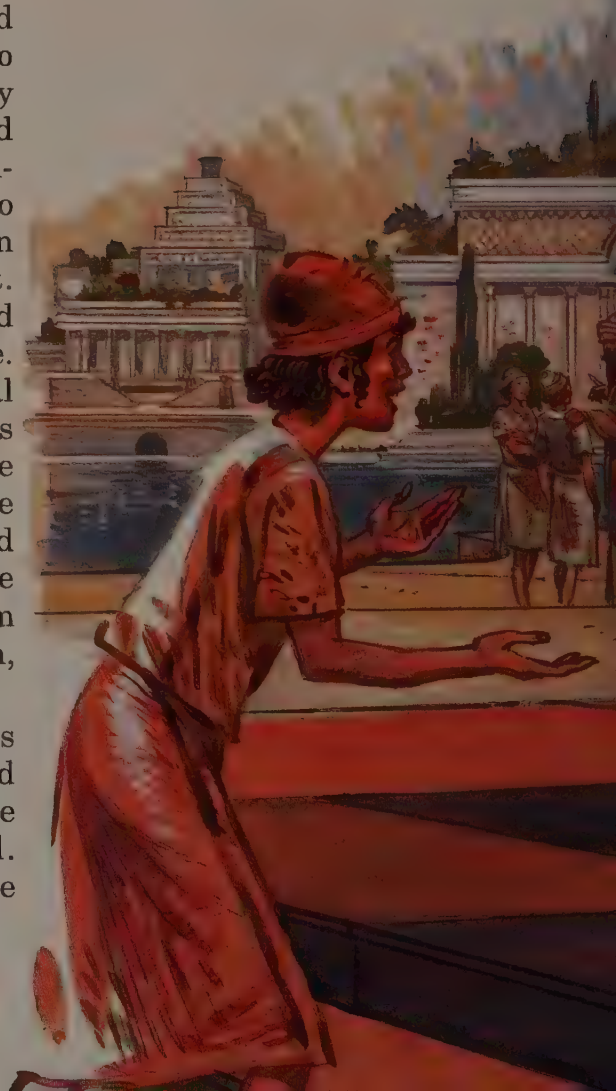
Daniel at the royal court

Daniel 1.3-20

Daniel came from a very good family. He was now a captive in Babylon. He was selected for special training and later became the government's chief official in that country. He was far away from his real home, but he never stopped loving and serving his God.

King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, his chief official, to choose some Jewish captives. They were to be young men from royal and noble families. They had to be good-looking, clever, well-trained, quick to learn, and healthy. They should learn how to serve in the royal court. Ashpenaz was to teach them to read and write the Babylonian language. Every day they were to be given royal food and wine. After three years of this training, they were to appear before the king. Among those chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were all from the tribe of Judah. The chief official gave them new names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Daniel decided not to disobey God's laws about food and drink. He asked Ashpenaz to help him. God made Ashpenaz kind towards Daniel. Ashpenaz, however, was afraid of the



king, so he said to Daniel, "The king has decided what you are to eat and drink. If you don't look as fit as the other young men, he may kill me."

So Daniel went to the man in charge. He said, "Plese test us for ten days. Give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare us with the young men who are eating the royal food."

He agreed to let them try it for ten days. When the time was up, they looked healthier and stronger than all those who had been eating the royal food. So from then on, the warden let them continue to eat vegetables instead of the royal food.

God gave the four young men wisdom to learn. Daniel was able to understand visions and dreams.

At the end of the three years set by the king, Ashpenaz took all the young men to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them. Whatever the king asked, Daniel and his friends knew much more than his fortune-tellers and magicians in his whole kingdom. So Daniel stayed at the king's palace.

The fiery furnace

Daniel 3.1-2,5-6,8,12,17-30

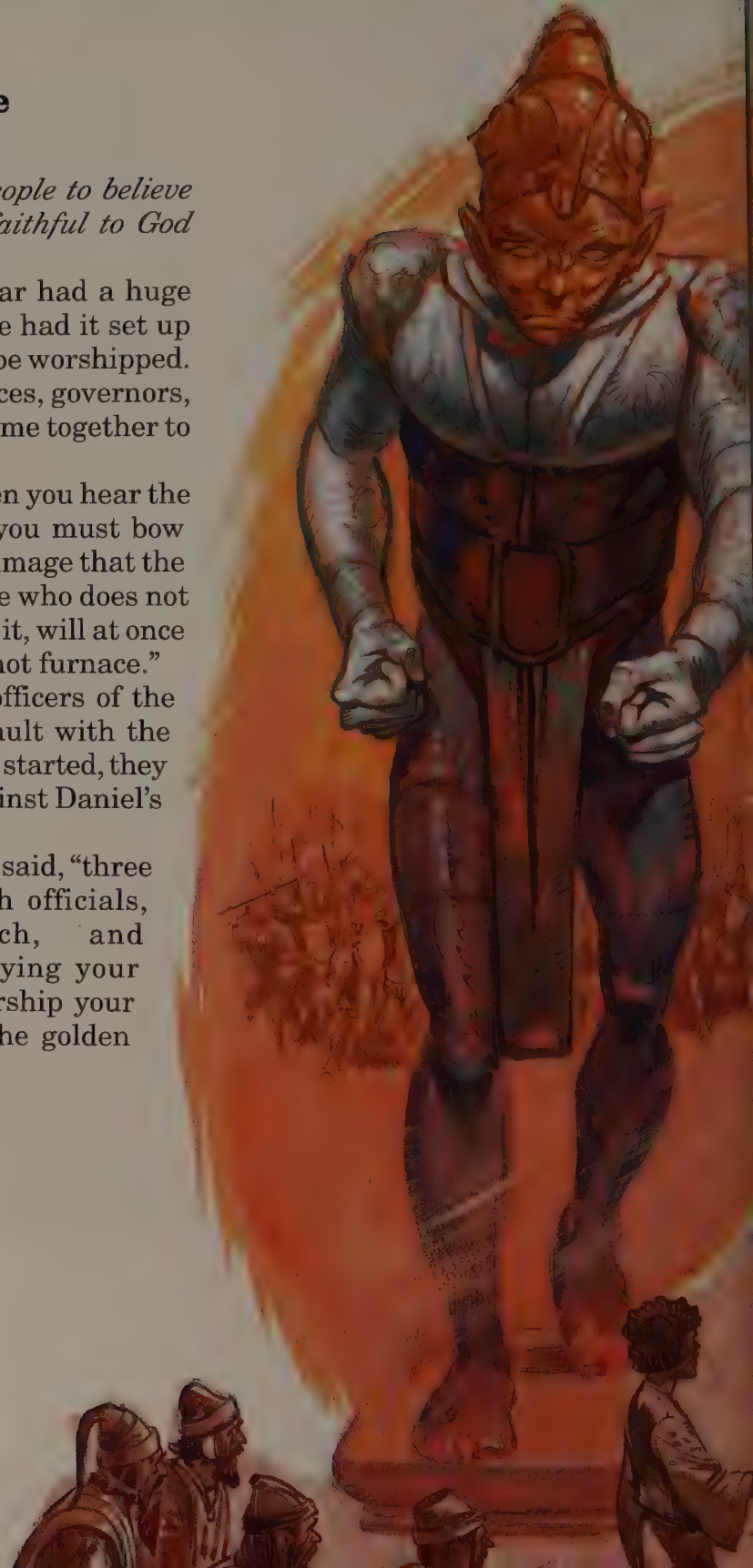
This story helped people to believe that those who were faithful to God need not fear.

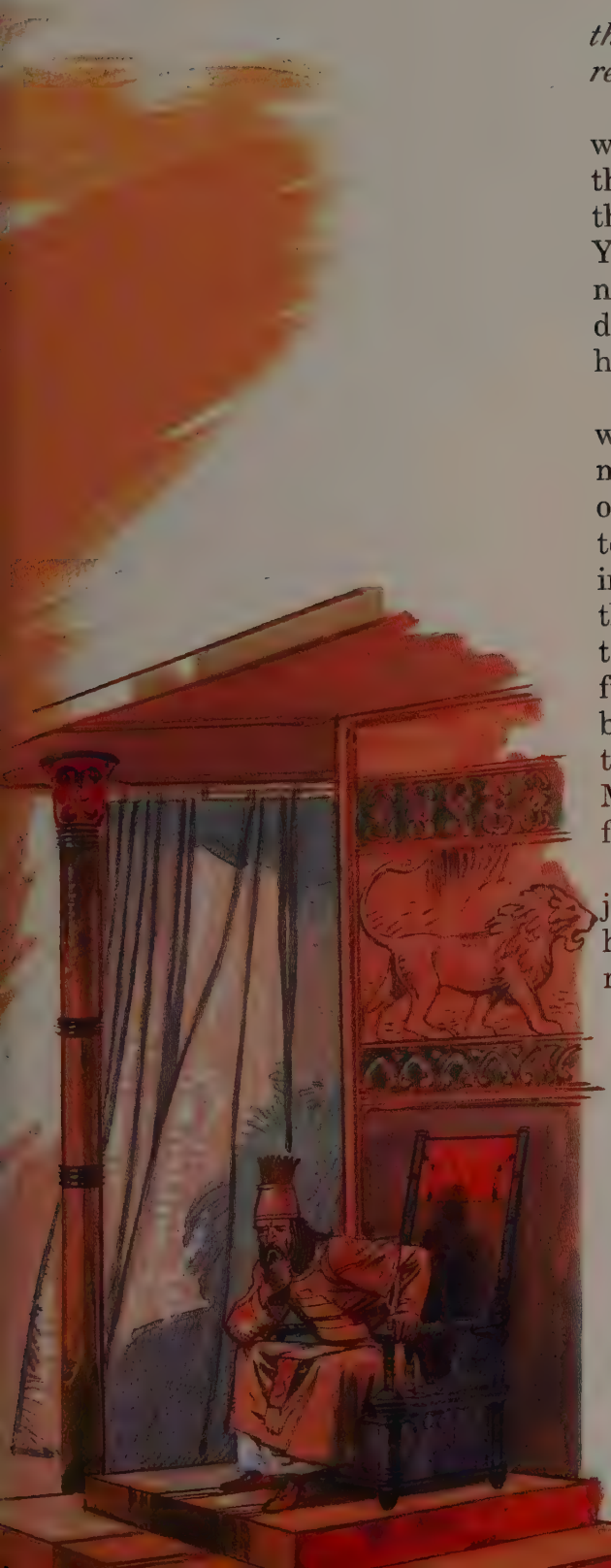
King Nebuchadnezzar had a huge golden image made. He had it set up in the plain of Dura to be worshipped. He ordered all his princes, governors, and other officials to come together to worship it.

The order said, "When you hear the instruments playing, you must bow down and worship the image that the king has set up. Anyone who does not bow down and worship it, will at once be thrown into a very hot furnace."

At that time some officers of the king wanted to find fault with the Jews. After the worship started, they came and reported against Daniel's friends.

"Your Majesty," they said, "three of your senior Jewish officials, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are disobeying your order. They do not worship your god or bow down to the golden image you set up."





The king called them and ordered them to worship the image, but they refused.

They said, "Your Majesty, if the God whom we serve is able to save us from the hot furnace and from your power, then he will. But even if he doesn't, Your Majesty may be sure that we will not worship your god. We will not bow down to the golden image that you have set up."

Then the king's face became red with anger. He ordered his men to make the furnace much hotter. He ordered the strongest men in his army to tie the three men and throw them into the red hot furnace. So they tied them up, with all their clothes, and threw them into the furnace. The furnace was so hot, that the flames burned up the guards who took the three men to the furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell into the fire.

Suddenly King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement. He asked his officials, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"

They answered, "Yes, we did, Your Majesty."

"But I see four men walking around in the fire!" he said. "They are not tied up or burnt and the fourth one looks like an angel."

So Nebuchadnezzar went up to the door of the furnace and called out, "Shadrach! Meshach! Abednego! Servants of the Most High God! Come out!" And they came out at once. All the princes, governors, and other officials of the king gathered to look at the three men. They had not been harmed by the fire. Their hair and their clothes were not burnt. There was no smell of smoke on them.

The king said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and saved these men who serve and trust him. They disobeyed my orders and risked their lives rather than bow down and worship any god except their own.

"If anyone in my kingdom speaks against their God, he will be torn apart. His house will be broken down. No other god can save like this."

And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to higher positions in the province of Babylon.

The writing on the wall

Daniel 5.1-12

Later on, Nebuchadnezzar became mad and behaved like an animal. After seven years he became well again and admitted that the Most High God was the true God. When he died, his son Belshazzar became king.

One night King Belshazzar invited a thousand important men to a grand dinner. He gave orders to bring in the gold and silver vessels. His father Nebuchadnezzar had taken these from the Temple in Jerusalem. Belshazzar and his family and guests were drinking from these vessels. Soon they began to praise their gods made of gold, silver and other things.

Suddenly the king saw a human hand writing on the brightly lit wall of the palace. His face turned pale and his knees began to shake with fear. He shouted for his magicians, wise men, and fortune-tellers. When they came in, he said, "If any of you can read this writing and tell me what it means, he will be dressed in kingly robes. He will wear a gold chain around his neck, and be the third in power in the kingdom." But no one could read the writing or tell its meaning. The king became even more afraid and his face became white. His advisers did not know what to do.

The king's mother heard the noise in the hall, and came to speak to him. She said, "Your Majesty, don't be upset or afraid!" There is a man in your kingdom who has godly power in him. When your father was king, this man showed knowledge and understanding. So your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief of the fortune-tellers, magicians, and wise men. He is very good at explaining the meaning of dreams and all kinds of mysteries. So send for this man Daniel, and he will tell you the meaning of all this."

Daniel explains the writing

Daniel 5.13-31

Daniel was brought at once to the king. The king said to him, "Are you Daniel, whom my father the king brought here from the land of Judah? I have heard that you have godly wisdom and power. I brought in my wise men to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not. Now I have heard that you can explain mysteries. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be dressed in kingly clothes. You will wear a gold chain around your neck, and be the third in power in the kingdom."

Daniel replied, "Your Majesty, I do not need any of your gifts. Please give them to someone else. I will read the writing and tell you what it means."

"The Most High God made your father Nebuchadnezzar a great king, and gave him honour and power. He was so great that peoples of all nations of the world were afraid of him. If he wanted to kill someone, he did. If he wanted to keep someone alive, he did. He honoured or dishonoured anyone he wanted to. But because he became proud, stubborn, and cruel, God removed him from his throne and he lost his honour. He had to get away from people and live like an animal. He ate grass like an ox, and slept in the open air with nothing to protect him from the dew. Finally, he came to know that the Most High God controls all rulers and he can give power to anyone he wants.

"You, his son, knew all this, yet you are very proud. You did things not pleasing to the Most High God. You brought in the vessels taken from his Temple. You, your important men, and your wives, drank wine out of them. You praised gods made of metal, wood, and stone. They are gods that cannot see or hear. They know nothing. You have not honoured the God who gives life or takes it away. He has power over everything you do. That is why God has sent the hand to write these words.

"This is what was written:

Numbered, Weighed, and *Divided*. And this is what it means-*Numbered*: God has numbered the days of your rule and brought it to an end. *Weighed*: you have been weighed in the balance and found to be too light. *Divided*: your kingdom will be divided up and given to the Medes and Persians."

Immediately Belshazzar ordered his servants to dress Daniel in kingly robes and put a gold chain around his neck. He made him the third in power in the kingdom. That same night Belshazzar, the king of Babylonia, was killed by the Medes. Darius, who was then 62 years old, became king in his place.

Daniel in the lions' pit

Daniel 6.1-28

King Darius appointed governors all over his kingdom. He made Daniel and two other officials in charge over the governors. Soon the king found that Daniel was much better than the other two. So he wanted to put Daniel in charge of these men. Then the other officials tried to find something wrong with the way Daniel carried out his duties, but they could not. Daniel was always honest and careful about everything. They said to each other, "We cannot find anything wrong with Daniel, except his religion."

So they went to see the king and said, "Your Majesty, we, the senior officials of your kingdom, make this request. Please give a strict order that for 30 days no one will be allowed to pray to any god or anyone other than Your Majesty. Anyone who disobeys this order should be thrown into a pit full of lions. We know that once you sign this order, it becomes a law of the kingdom and no one can change it." And so King Darius signed the order. When Daniel heard about the order, he went to an upstairs room of his house. He knelt down as usual with the windows open towards Jerusalem, and prayed to his God three times a day.

When Daniel's enemies saw him praying to his God, all of them went together to the king to report against Daniel. They said, "Your Majesty, you have signed an order that for the next 30 days anyone who prays to any god or anyone other than yourself, would be thrown into a pit full of lions."

The king replied, "Yes, that is a strict order, a law of the kingdom, which cannot be changed."

Then they said to the king, "Daniel, that man from Judah, does not obey Your Majesty's order. He prays to his God three times a day."

On hearing this the king was upset, and tried everything to find some way to rescue Daniel. He kept on trying until sunset. Then the men came back to the king and said to him, "Your Majesty, an order of the king cannot be changed, for it is the law of the kingdom."

So Daniel was thrown into the pit full of lions at the king's order. He

said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, save you." The pit was covered with a stone, and the king placed his seal on the stone, so that no one could save Daniel. Then the king returned to the palace. He could not eat, sleep or enjoy anything that night.

Early in the morning the king got up and rushed to the pit. Then he called out in a troubled voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was the God you serve so faithfully, able to save you from the lions?"

Daniel answered, "May Your Majesty live forever! God sent his angel to shut the mouths of the lions so that they would not hurt that I had done nothing wrong against him or against the king."

The king was so happy and gave orders for Daniel to be pulled up out of the pit. So they pulled him up and saw that he had not been hurt at all, for he trusted God. Then the king gave orders to arrest all the men who had blamed Daniel. They, along with their wives and their children, were thrown into the pit filled with lions. Before they even reached the bottom of the pit, the lions pounced on them and broke all their bones.

Then King Darius wrote to the people of all nations: "Greetings! I command that throughout my empire, everyone should respect Daniel's God.

"He is the living God,
and he will rule forever.
His kingdom will never be
destroyed,
and his power will never come
to an end.
He saves and rescues.
He does wonders and miracles
in heaven and on earth.
He saved Daniel from being killed
by the lions!"

So things went well for Daniel during the rule of King Darius and the rule of King Cyrus.

THERE IS HOPE

Many of God's people were taken as captives to Babylon. They stayed together in a group and formed a community. They were allowed to build houses and earn a living. They could even keep their own customs and religion. But they were not free to go back to their own country where God's Temple was.

Ezekiel's vision of God

Ezekiel 1.1,3-9,22-27

Ezekiel had been trained to be a priest in God's Temple in Jerusalem. As a captive, Ezekiel thought that all his hopes of serving God were gone. But he discovered that God had a special plan for him in Babylon.

Ezekiel said, "I was living with my people who had been taken away to Babylon. One day the sky opened, and I had a vision of God. I heard the LORD speak to me, and I felt his power.

"I looked up and saw a storm coming from the north. Lightning was flashing from a huge cloud. The sky around it was bright, and something shone like bright metal. At the centre of the storm I saw what looked like four living things in human form. But each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight, and they had hoofs like those of a bull. They shone like polished metal. They also had a human hand under each wing. They spread out two wings to form a square with their wing-tips touching. They covered their bodies with the other two wings.

"Above their heads there was something that looked like a sparkling glass dome. When they flew, the wings made a noise. It was like the roar of the sea, like the noise of a huge army, like the roll of thunder. When they stopped flying, they folded their wings. But there was still a sound coming from above the dome over their heads.

"Above the dome there was something which looked like a throne made of blue sapphire. There was a shape on the throne that looked like a man. It shone with a very bright light. All the colours of the rainbow were there. This was the dazzling light of the presence of the LORD.

God calls Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1.28-2.5

"When I saw this, I fell face downward on the ground. Then I heard a voice, 'Stand up, man, I want to talk to you.'

"While the voice was speaking, God's spirit came into me and raised me to my feet. The voice continued, "I am sending you to the people of Israel. They have always turned against me, just as their fathers did. They are stubborn and do not honour me. So I am sending you to speak to them for me, the Great God. They will know that a prophet has spoken God's message to them. They may or may not listen to you."

Sheep without a shepherd

Ezekiel 34.11-15

Ezekiel saw the people as scattered sheep. He saw their rulers as bad shepherds. The people of Israel knew about keeping sheep. Often wild animals attacked and scattered the flock. It took a brave shepherd to protect his sheep. So Ezekiel gave this message from God to the people.

"I, the Great God, am like a shepherd to the people of Israel. When the sheep are scattered because of fear of danger, the shepherd brings them together. In the same way, I still take care of my people. Their enemies have taken them to many lands. But I will bring them back to their own land. They will enjoy the mountains, valleys, and streams and grow their crops. I am the Great God who will keep my promises."

The valley of dry bones

Ezekiel 37.1-14

Here Ezekiel speaks about another vision God showed him.

"I felt that God was with me. His spirit took me to a valley and showed me around. There were dry bones everywhere on the ground. He asked

me, 'Man, can these bones come back to life?' "I replied, 'Great God, only you can answer that.'

"He said, 'Speak my words to the dry bones. Let them listen. Tell them what I, the Great God, am saying to them: "I will breathe life into you again. I will give you complete bodies and make you live. Then you will know that I am God."'

"So I spoke these words of God. While I was speaking, I heard the noise of the bones joining together. They became many bodies, but the bodies were not breathing.

"Then God said to me, 'Man, speak to the wind. I, the Great God , want the wind to blow from everywhere and give life to these bodies.'

"So I spoke God's word to the wind. Breath entered the bodies. They came to life and stood up as a large crowd.

"God said to me 'Man, the people of Israel think they are dried like these bones' because they are in other lands. They say that they can never come back. But I will bring them back to their own land. When they live in their own land, they will know that I am God. This is my promise, and it will happen.'"

FREEDOM AT LAST

Wonderful news!

Ezra 1.1-4

God uses powerful nations to carry out his plans.

In his first year as king, Cyrus of Persia was guided by God to give a special command. This was sent to his people throughout the empire. God's prophet Jeremiah had said long ago that this would happen. The command was this:

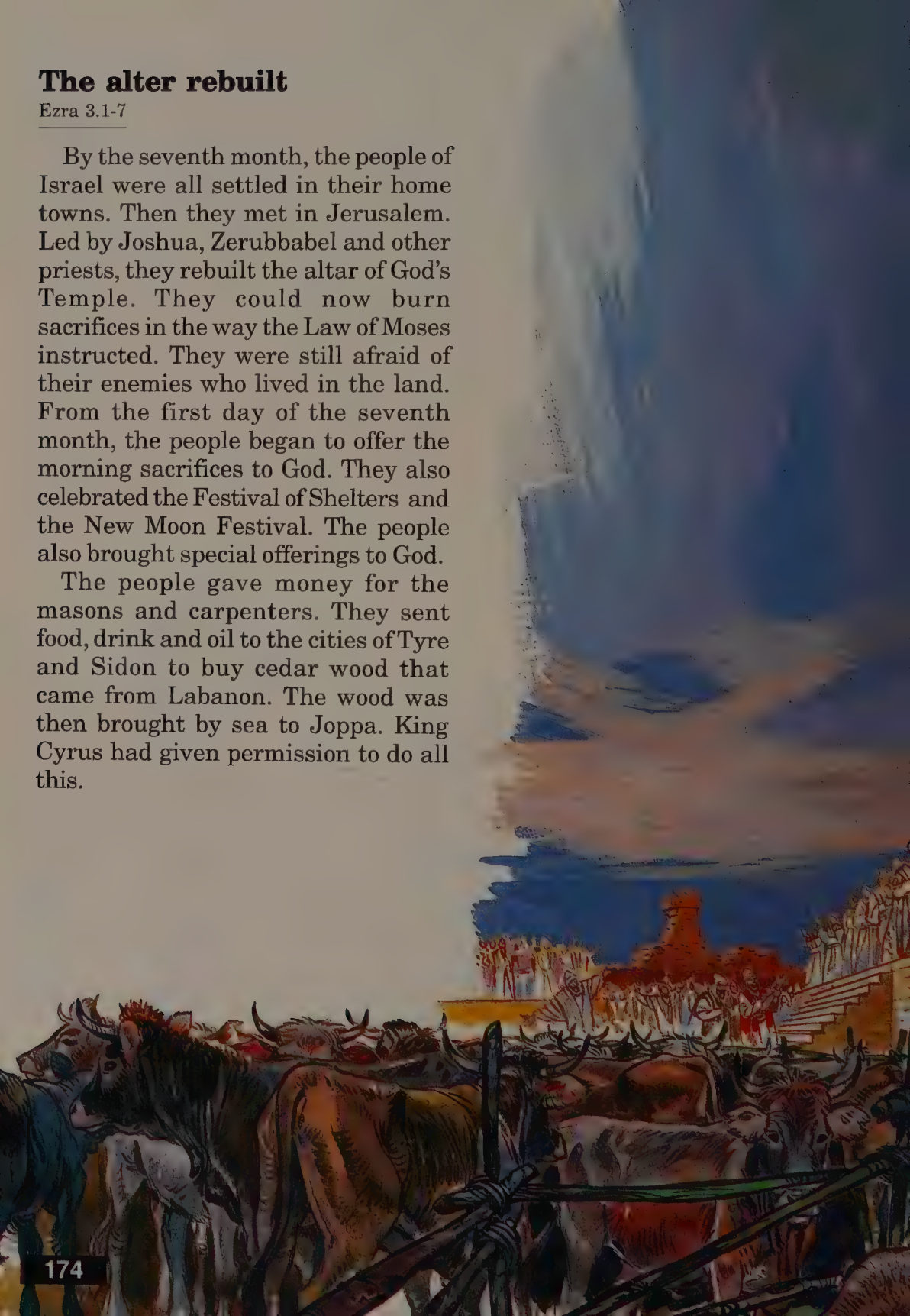
"I, Cyrus, King of Persia, send this order to all the people. The true God, ruler of heaven, has made me king over all people. He has asked me to build his Temple in Jerusalem, in the land of Judah. May God be with all of you Jews. You are to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of your God. If any of you Jews who live outside your country need help to return, your neighbours must give you help. They must give you silver and gold and other things you need. Your neighbours must also give you animals to carry your goods and must send gifts to the God in Jerusalem."

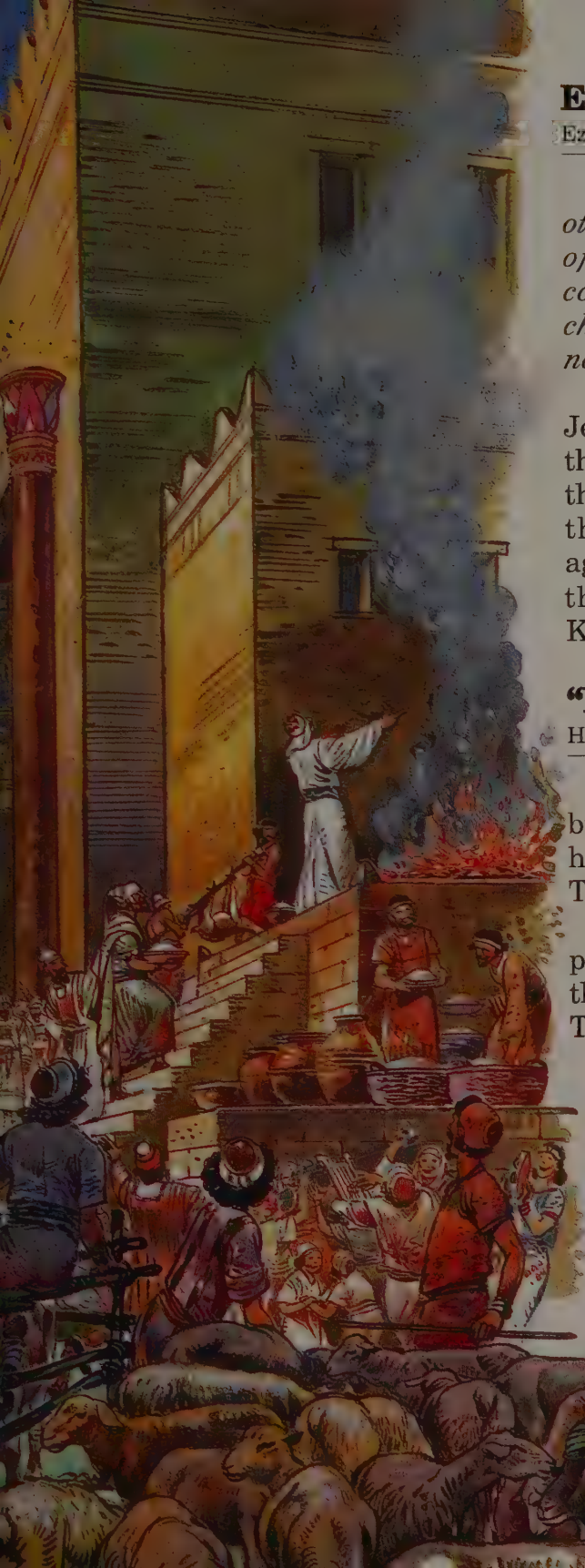
The alter rebuilt

Ezra 3.1-7

By the seventh month, the people of Israel were all settled in their home towns. Then they met in Jerusalem. Led by Joshua, Zerubbabel and other priests, they rebuilt the altar of God's Temple. They could now burn sacrifices in the way the Law of Moses instructed. They were still afraid of their enemies who lived in the land. From the first day of the seventh month, the people began to offer the morning sacrifices to God. They also celebrated the Festival of Shelters and the New Moon Festival. The people also brought special offerings to God.

The people gave money for the masons and carpenters. They sent food, drink and oil to the cities of Tyre and Sidon to buy cedar wood that came from Labanon. The wood was then brought by sea to Joppa. King Cyrus had given permission to do all this.





Enemies make trouble

Ezra 4.4-5

Foreigners, who worshipped other gods, lived in the northern part of Israel. When Jerusalem was conquered, these people and their children spread southwards. They did not want the Temple rebuilt.

The enmeies of the Jews in Jerusalem began to make trouble for them whenever they tried to rebuild the Temple. They also gave money to the government officials to work against them. They went on troubling them during and long after the rule of King Cyrus.

"Rebuild the Temple!"

Haggai 1.2-9

The people had settled in Jerusalem but were finding it hard to live. They had not yet started to rebuild the Temple.

The Almighty God said to the prophet Haggai, "My people say that this is not the right time to rebuild the Temple. You tell them this: 'people, you

live in good houses, but my Temple is broken down. Don't you see what is happening to you? You planted much grain, but have harvested very little! You do not have enough clothes to keep you warm. And the workers cannot earn enough to live. Now go up to the hills, get wood, and rebuild my Temple. Only when you start worshipping me in the Temple will I be happy with you.' "

The people started to rebuild the Temple. They had many problems, but God blessed and helped them.

Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem

Nehemiah 2.1-8

Nearly 60 years later, King Artaxerxes ruled the empire. Nehemiah was a trusted official of the King. He knew the Temple city of Jerusalem was in ruins. He asked the king if he could return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and its walls.

"One day, I, Nehemiah, was serving wine to King Artaxerxes at dinner. He saw me very sad. He had never seen me like this before. So he asked me, 'Why are you looking so sad? Are you sick?' "

"I was surprised and afraid. I answered, 'Your Majesty, my home city was burnt down long ago. My ancestors are buried there. This is what makes me so sad.'

"The king asked, 'What do you want?'

"I prayed to the LORD God and replied, 'Your Majesty, may I go to Jerusalem, my home city, and rebuild it?'

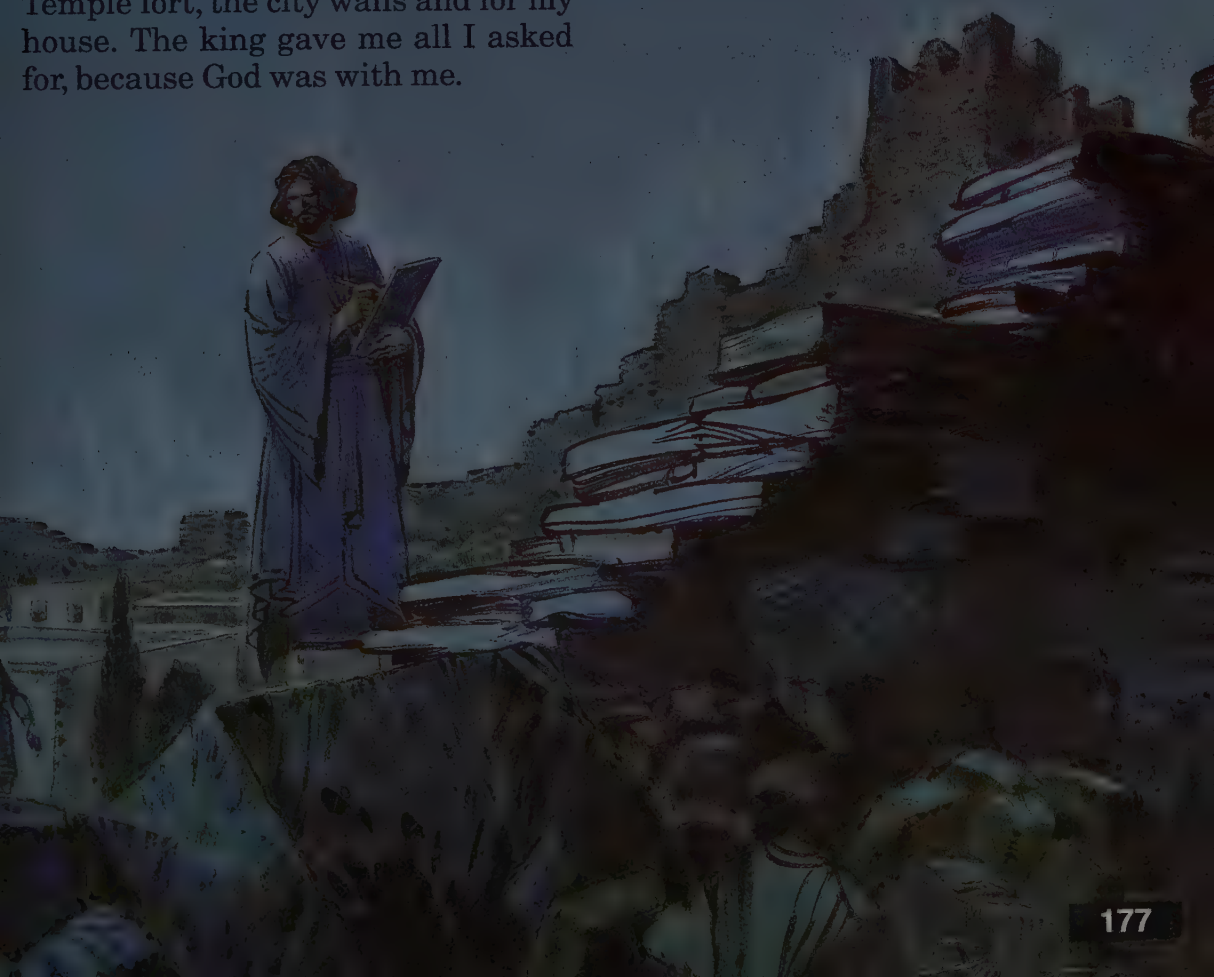
"The queen was also sitting with the king at dinner. The king was pleased to grant my request. He asked me how long I would be away.

"I asked for letters of permission to pass through the different provinces on the other side of the river Euphrates. I also took another letter from the king for Asaph, the forest officer. The king asked him to give all the wood needed for the gates of the Temple fort, the city walls and for my house. The king gave me all I asked for, because God was with me.

A night ride through the ruins

Nehemiah 2.11-20

"After I reached Jerusalem, I kept quiet for three days. I did not tell anyone what God had told me to do for the city. Then in the middle of the night, I went out with a few men. I was riding a donkey. I left the city through the Valley Gate on the west and went south. I passed Dragon's Fountain and reached the Rubbish Gate. As I went, I looked at the broken walls of the city and the gates that had been burnt down. Then on the east side of the city,



I went north to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool. My donkey could not find any path through the heaps of stones. So I went riding down into Kidron Valley, looking at the wall. At last I returned to the city through the Valley Gate.

"The city officials did not know where I had gone or what I had been doing. So far I had not said anything to any of my people about rebuilding the wall. But now I called together the priests, the elders, the officials and others and said to them, 'You know our shame and sorrow, because our city remains broken and burnt down. Let us overcome this problem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.' I also told them how God had helped me, and what the king had said to me.

"They answered, 'Let's start building!' And they got ready to start the work.

"When Sanballat, Tobiah, and an Arab named Geshem heard of our plan, they laughed at us and said, 'What do you think you're doing? Are you going to rise up against the king?'

"I answered, 'Our God will help us. We are his servants, and we are going to start building. But you are not one of our people, and you have no right over Jerusalem.'

The danger of war

Nehemaih 4.1-23

"When Sanballat heard that we Jews had begun rebuilding the wall, he became very angry and began to make fun of us. In front of his companions and the troops from Samaria he said, 'What do these foolish Jews think they're doing? Do they think they can rebuild the city? Do they think that by offering sacrifices they can finish the work in one day? Can they collect stones out of these heaps of broken walls?'

"Tobiah was standing there beside him, and he said, 'What kind of wall will they build? Even a fox could knock it down!'

"I prayed, 'Hear how they make fun of us, O God! Punish them for this. Let them lose everything they have, and let them be taken as prisoners to a foreign land.' "So we went on rebuilding the wall. People worked very hard and it was half finished."

"Sanballat, Tobiah, and the people of the neighbouring countries heard that the wall was coming up and that the gaps in the wall were repaired.

They became very angry and planned to attack Jerusalem and stop our work. But we prayed to our God and kept guards against them day and night.

"The people of Judah used to sing this song:

Weary we grow with our burdens.
see how much rubble is left!
How can we build the wall
today?

"Often our enemies thought they could attack us suddenly and put an end to our work by killing us. But the Jews who were living among our enemies would come to know of their plans and tell us at once. So I gave the people swords, spears, and bows, and placed them by families behind the wall, wherever it was still unfinished. "I saw that the people were worried. So I said to them and to their leaders and the officials, "Don't be afraid of our enemies. Our Great God can indeed terrify them and fight for your people and your families." Our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had defeated them. So we continued to rebuild the wall.

"From then on, half of my men worked and half stood armed, ready for battle. Our leaders helped the workers in every way. Those who carried building materials did so with one hand. In the other they carried a weapon. Every mason kept a sword at his side. The man who was to sound the alarm on the bugle stayed with me. I told the people, their leaders and officials, "The work on the wall is spread out over a long distance. We are widely separated from one another. If you hear the bugle, gather around me. Our God will fight for us. "So every day, from early morning till late evening, half of us worked on the wall, while the other half stood guard with weapons.

"I told the men in charge of the work that they all their helpers had to stay in Jerusalem at night. We could then guard the city at night and work in the daytime. None of us took off our clothes even at night. All of us always kept our weapons at hand.

An evil plan against Nehemaih

Nehemaih 6.1-14

"Our enemies heard that we had completed the wall, although we had not finished the gates. So they sent me a message, asking me to meet them in one of the villages in the Plain of Ono. This was their trick to harm me. I sent messengers to tell them, 'I am doing important work and can't go down there. I am not going to let the work stop just to meet you.'

"They sent me the same message four times, and each time I sent the same reply.

"Then Sanballat sent one of his servants to me with a fifth message. It was an open letter.

It read:

'Geshem has told me that the people of the countries around us are talking about the Jews. They say that you and peolpe want to rise against the king. This is why you are rebuilding the wall. He also saysthatyou plan to make yourself king. You have asked some

prophets to tell everyone in Jerusalem that you are the king of Judah. His Majesty is sure to hear about this. So I suggest that you come and talk it over with me.'

"I sent this reply to him: 'You are lying. You have made up the story.'

"Our enemies were trying to make us stop our work. So I prayed, 'God, make me strong!'

"About this time I went to visit Shemaiah, who was unable to leave his house. He said to me, 'You and I must go and hide in the Temple, because they are coming to kill you.'

"I answered, 'Do you think I am a coward to hide in the Temple?'

"I understand that God had not spoken to him. Tobiah and Sanballat had paid money to him to give me this advice. They hired him to make me do the wrong thing out of fear. They thought they could put me to shame in this way.

"I prayed, "God, don't forget what Tobiah and Sanballat have done and punish them. Don't forget all those who spoke in your name and tried to frighten me.'

The wall is finished!

Nehemiah 6.15-16

"After 52 days of work, the entire wall was finished. When our enemies in the neighbouring nations heard this, they were ashamed. Everyone knew that the work had been done with God's help.

The people renew their promise

Nehemiah 8.1-3,5-8; 9.1-2,38; 10.28-29

By the seventh month, the people of Israel were all settled in their towns. On the first day of that month, they all gathered in Jerusalem, in the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra, the priest and teacher of the Law of Moses, to bring

the book of the Law. Ezra brought it before the people. There were men, women, and children who were old enough to understand.

"Ezra stood on a platform and opened the book. And all stood up. Ezra said, 'Praise the LORD, the Great God.'

"All the people raised their arms and answered, 'Amen! Amen!' They bowed down to the ground in worship.

"Ezra read out the Law to the people from early morning until noon. theylistened carefully. Some of the men explained the Law to them. First they put the word of the Low into their own language and explained it. then the people could understand it.

"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month the people of the Israel met together. They fasted to show sorrow for their sins. They asked forgiveness for their sins and worshipped God.

"They made this promise to God: 'We, the people of Israel, including our elders, priests and those who help in the Temple and our families make this promise to God in writing. Our leaders put their seal to it. We know how we suffered in the past because we disobeyed God. We have now decided to separate ourselves from those who do not worship you according to the Law of Moses. We will live by this law and obey all that our God has told us. If we do not obey God, may he punish us.'"

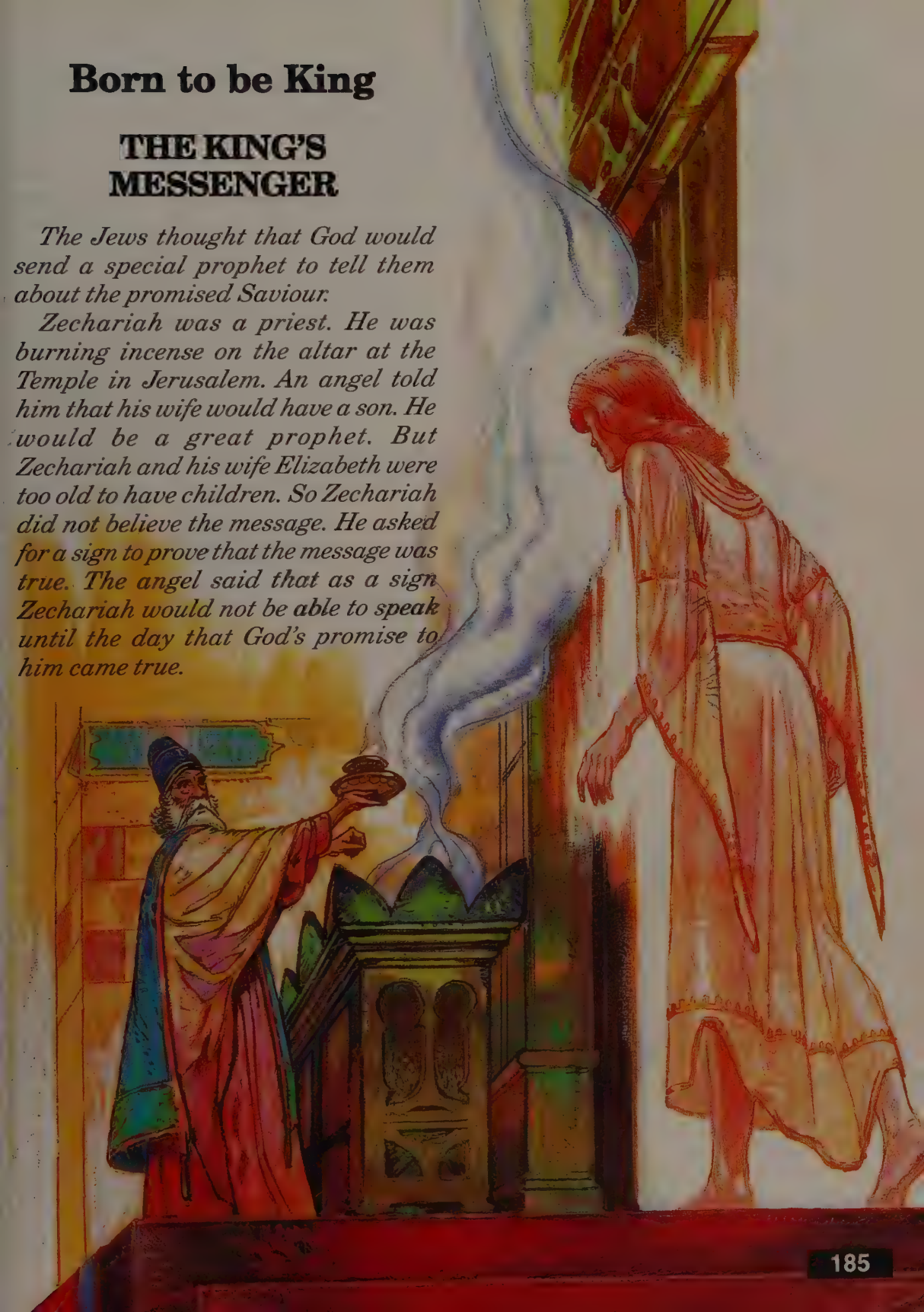
THE NEW TESTAMENT

Born to be King

THE KING'S MESSENGER

The Jews thought that God would send a special prophet to tell them about the promised Saviour.

Zechariah was a priest. He was burning incense on the altar at the Temple in Jerusalem. An angel told him that his wife would have a son. He would be a great prophet. But Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were too old to have children. So Zechariah did not believe the message. He asked for a sign to prove that the message was true. The angel said that as a sign Zechariah would not be able to speak until the day that God's promise to him came true.



Name him John!

Luke 1.57-66

It was a Jewish custom to give children the names of honoured family members. The Jews thought a person's name was important, because the name told something about the person. The angel had told Zechariah that his son should be called John. "John" means "God is loving".

When the time came, Elizabeth had a baby son. Her neighbours and relatives heard of God's goodness to her. They were also very happy.

When the baby was a week old, they wanted to name him Zechariah, in honour of his father. But his mother said, "No! His name is to be John."

They said to her, "But no one in your family has that name!" Then with signs they asked the father to name the boy.

Zechariah asked for something to write on. He wrote, "His name is John!" At once Zechariah was able

to talk again! He started praising God. All the neighbours were amazed. People all over the hill country of Judea talked about this. Everyone asked, "What is this child going to be?" They could see that the boy was a special gift from God.

John's father praises God

Luke 1.67-80

The Holy Spirit spoke these words through Zechariah, John's father,

"Let us praise our God, O people of Israel!
For he has come to help us.
He has given us a great Saviour from the family of his servant King David.
All God's messengers had told this to our fathers.
God said he would remember his promise.
He would save his people from their enemies.
Then they could always live without fear
and obey him in everything.
You, my child, will be the messenger of the Most High God.
You will prepare the way for the Lord's coming.
You will tell his people that he will forgive their sins and save them.
Our God is so good and loving.
His salvation will shine on us like a light.
It will be a light to all who live in fear of death.
He will show us the way of peace."

The child grew strong and wise. He lived in the desert until the day he came out to speak God's message to the people of Israel.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

Mary's surprise

Luke 1.26-38

God speaks to people in many different ways. In very early times God spoke to his people through special messengers called "prophets". But there were no prophets for many years. Sometimes God also chose to speak through angels.

Three months before John was born, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town called Nazareth in Galilee. He had a message for Mary, who was to marry Joseph. Joseph was born in

the family of King David. The angel came to her and said, "Hello, Mary! God's special blessing is on you!"

Mary could not understand what the angel said. She was very worried. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary. This is how God will favour you. You will have a son. You will call him Jesus. He will be known as the Son of God. God will make him a great ruler like his ancestor, King David. He will rule over God's people forever!"

Mary said to the angel, "I am not yet married. How can I have a son?" The angel answered, "The power of God's Spirit will come upon you. So your child will be called the Son of God. Think of your cousin Elizabeth. People said she could not have a baby, because she is very old. But in another three months she will have a baby. Remember, God can do anything!"

"I am God's servant," said Mary. "May God do with me as you have said." Then the angel went away.

Mary visits Elizabeth

Luke 1.39-45

Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph lived, was in the northern part of Palestine. Elizabeth and Zechariah lived in Judaea in the south.

Soon afterward Mary went to Zechariah's house in the hill country of Judea. When she greeted Elizabeth, the baby inside her moved with joy. The Holy Spirit spoke through her. In a loud voice she said, "Mary, God has favoured you more than any other woman. You will be the mother of a very special child. How honoured I am that my Lord's mother is visiting me. No wonder the baby inside me moved with joy as soon as I heard your voice! How happy you are, to believe God's message!"

Mary's song of praise

Luke 1.46-56

Mary was very excited by all that she had seen and heard. She praised God with these words. Her song of praise speaks about what God does to humble people who trust him. No wonder this song is still used in the churches today.

Mary said,
"I will sing with joy and praise
God, my Saviour.
He has remembered me, his
servant!
People will always call me the
happiest woman,
for the Almighty has done great
things for me.
The Holy God is always so good to
those who honour him.
His power brings the proud to
nothing.
He takes away great kings from
their thrones,
and lifts up the humble ones.
He gives food to the hungry,
but the rich go away with
nothing.
He has kept his promise to our
fathers,
and has come to help our people.
He has remembered his promise
to Abraham
that he will be good to his

descendants forever!"

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then went back home.

Jesus is born

Luke 2.1-7

The Roman government wanted to make sure that all people of the country paid taxes. So a census was ordered. Everyone was asked to return to their home town or village before the counting started. Joseph's home town was Bethlehem, which was also the birthplace of King David.

At that time the Roman King Augustus ordered all the people of his Empire to be counted. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the Governor of Syria.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea. He belonged to the family of King David, whose birthplace was Bethlehem. Joseph took Mary with him. When they reached Bethlehem, it was time for her to have her first baby. But they could not find room in any guest house. So they went into a cattle-shed. That night Mary gave birth to a son. She wrapped the baby in soft cloth and put him in a manger.

Good news to the shepherds

Luke 2.8-20

That night some shepherds were taking care of their flocks in the fields. An angel appeared to them. A bright light from God shone over them. The shepherds were terribly afraid. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news. It will bring great joy to you and all people. Today in David's town your Saviour and Lord was born. You will find a baby wrapped in soft cloth in a manger. Then you will know it is true."

Soon the sky was filled with a large number of angels. They sang praises to God:

"Glory to the Most High God in heaven!
Peace on earth to all who please God!"

Then the angels went back to heaven. The shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what God has told us."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. Then the shepherds told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed. Mary remembered and thought much about these things. The shepherds went back, praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Naming the baby

Luke 2.21

The ceremony of "circumcision" is a very old Jewish custom. This ceremony is seen as a sign of God's promises to his people. It takes place when a boy is a week old. On this day the boys are given names. The name "Jesus" in Hebrew is the same as "Joshua" and means "Saviour".

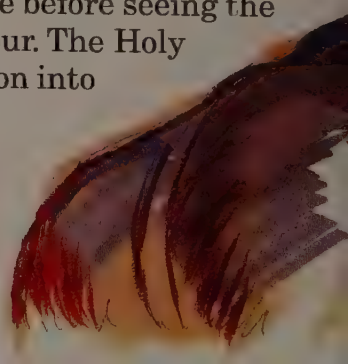
A week later, when the time came for the baby to be named, he was called Jesus. This was the name the angel had given before he was born.

Jesus is presented in the Temple

Luke 2.22-38

Simeon was a godly man, who lived in Jerusalem. God had promised him that he would see the Saviour before he died.

Wanting to obey God's Law, Joseph and Mary took their baby to Jerusalem. This is what God's Law says, "Every first baby boy is to be presented to God." They also had to offer two young pigeons. A man called Simeon lived in Jerusalem. He was a good man, who loved God. He was waiting for God to help his people. God's Holy Spirit had told him that he would not die before seeing the promised Saviour. The Holy Spirit led Simeon into



the Temple. Just then the parents brought baby Jesus into the Temple. Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God. He said,

"Now, Lord, I can die in peace.
You have shown me the
Saviour.
You made him ready for all
people.

He will show your way to all nations.

He will bring honour to your people Israel."

The child's parents were amazed at what Simeon said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, "God has chosen this child to be a sign for the people of Israel! Many will speak against him and will be lost. Others will accept him and be saved. He will bring to light the secrets of all. Things will happen to make you very sad!"

There was an 84-year-old woman of God, named Anna. She was a widow for very long and lived in the Temple. Day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying. She also saw the baby and thanked God. She spoke about him to all who were waiting for God to free his people.

WHEN JESUS WAS YOUNG

Visitors from the East

Matthew 2.1-12

Herod was a "puppet king". He was put in power by the Romans. They allowed him to rule as long as he kept law and order and collected taxes. What Herod feared most was someone else taking over his power.

Herod was king when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Some men in the East, who studied the stars, knew about this. They came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the baby born to be King of the Jews? We saw his star in the East. We have come to worship him."

King Herod and everyone else in Jerusalem were very upset on hearing this. He called together all the chief priests and the religious teachers and asked them, "Where will the Promised One be born?"

"In Bethlehem," they answered. "The prophet says:

Bethlehem, you are important
among the towns in Judea,
for in you a leader will be born
for my people."

So Herod secretly called in the visitors from the East. He asked for the exact time when they first saw the star. Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, "Go and find the baby King. Let me know where he is. I also want to go and worship him."

So they went on their way. They were very happy to see the same star they had seen in the East. It led them to the house where the child was. They went into the house and found the child with his mother Mary. They knelt down and worshipped him. They offered gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts to him.

Then they returned to their country by another road. God had told them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The escape to Egypt

Matthew 2.13-15

After the visitors had left, an angel told Joseph in a dream, "Herod is looking for the child. He wants to kill him. Rush to Egypt with the baby and his mother. Stay there until I tell you to leave." Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left that same night for Egypt. He stayed there until Herod died. These words of the prophet now came true:

"I called my Son out of Egypt."

Herod's cruelty

Matthew 2.16

Herod wanted his own son to be the next king. He did not want Jesus to become king. But where was Jesus? How could he kill him? He knew that Jesus was about two years old.

Herod saw that the visitors from the East had tricked him. He was very angry. So he ordered all boys about two years old in the district of Bethlehem to be killed.

Return from Egypt

Matthew 2.19-23

After Herod died, an angel told Joseph in a dream, "Get up, go back to your land with the child and his mother. The one who tried to kill the child is dead." So Joseph went back with them to his own country.

But when Joseph heard that Herod's son was now king of Judea, he was afraid to go there. So God told him in another dream to go to Galilee. He went there and lived in a town called Nazareth. These words of another prophet now came true: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Boy Jesus in the Temple

Luke 2.41-52

At the age of twelve, Jewish boys were allowed to join in the religious ceremonies.

In the Temple courtyard the religious leaders would talk and answer questions.

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they took him to the festival. When the festival was over, Jesus stayed behind in the Temple. His parents did not know this. They thought he was with their relations and friends. After travelling a whole day, they began looking for him. When they could not find him, they went back to Jerusalem. On the third day they found him. He was in the Temple, sitting with the religious teachers. He was listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his wise words. His parents were upset when they saw him. His mother said to him, "Son, why did you do this? Your father and I have been so worried trying to find you!"

He answered, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said.

Jesus went home with them to Nazareth. He was obedient to them. His mother kept thinking about all that had happened. Jesus continued to grow. He became wise and strong. He was liked by both God and people.

How Jesus lived

About 18 years passed since Jesus visited the Temple as a boy. We know very little about his life during that time. He may have worked at home as a carpenter.

What we do know is that Jesus was about 30 years old when he left Nazareth. He travelled around Palestine, preaching and doing wonderful things in God's name. He did this for about three years. Four of the disciples Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote about Jesus. In the Bible their writings are placed at the beginning of the New Testament. These are called "Gospels" or "Good News".

JOHN PREPARES THE WAY

In those days there was no radio, television, telephone, or postal service. Before a king visited any place, a messenger would be sent in advance. He would tell people to get ready for the king. At the birth of John, his father Zechariah had said that John would be the messenger of the promised Saviour.

John's message

Luke 3.3,7

John lived a simple life in a wild and lonely place. People went to hear him speak about God. He told them boldly that they had to change their ways. If they did not, God would punish them. In front of everyone many said they were sorry for not obeying God. Then he baptized them in the River Jordan.

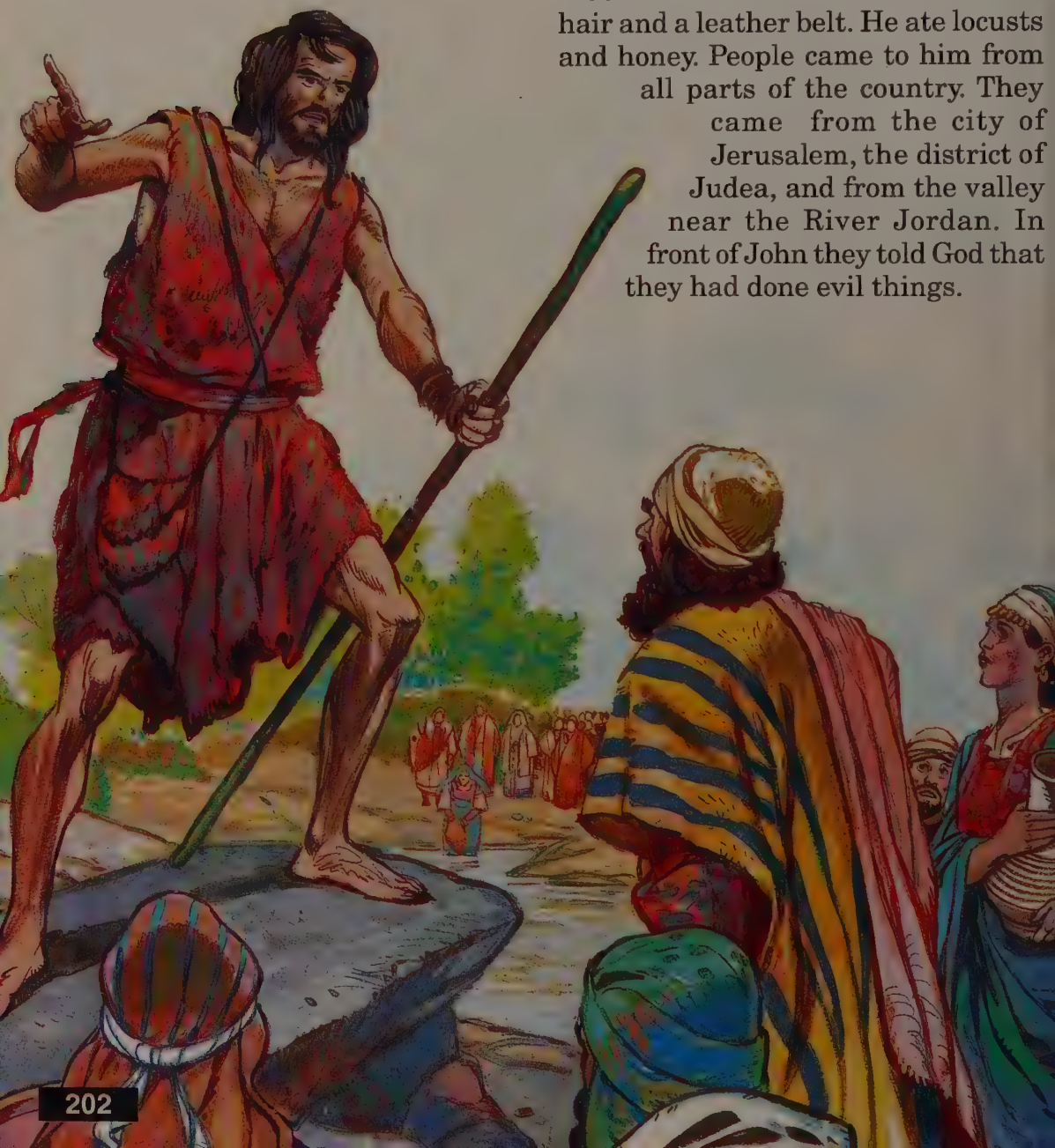
God spoke to John, the son of Zechariah. He went all along the River Jordan, telling people, "Stop doing things that make God unhappy. Be baptized, and God will forgive your sins."

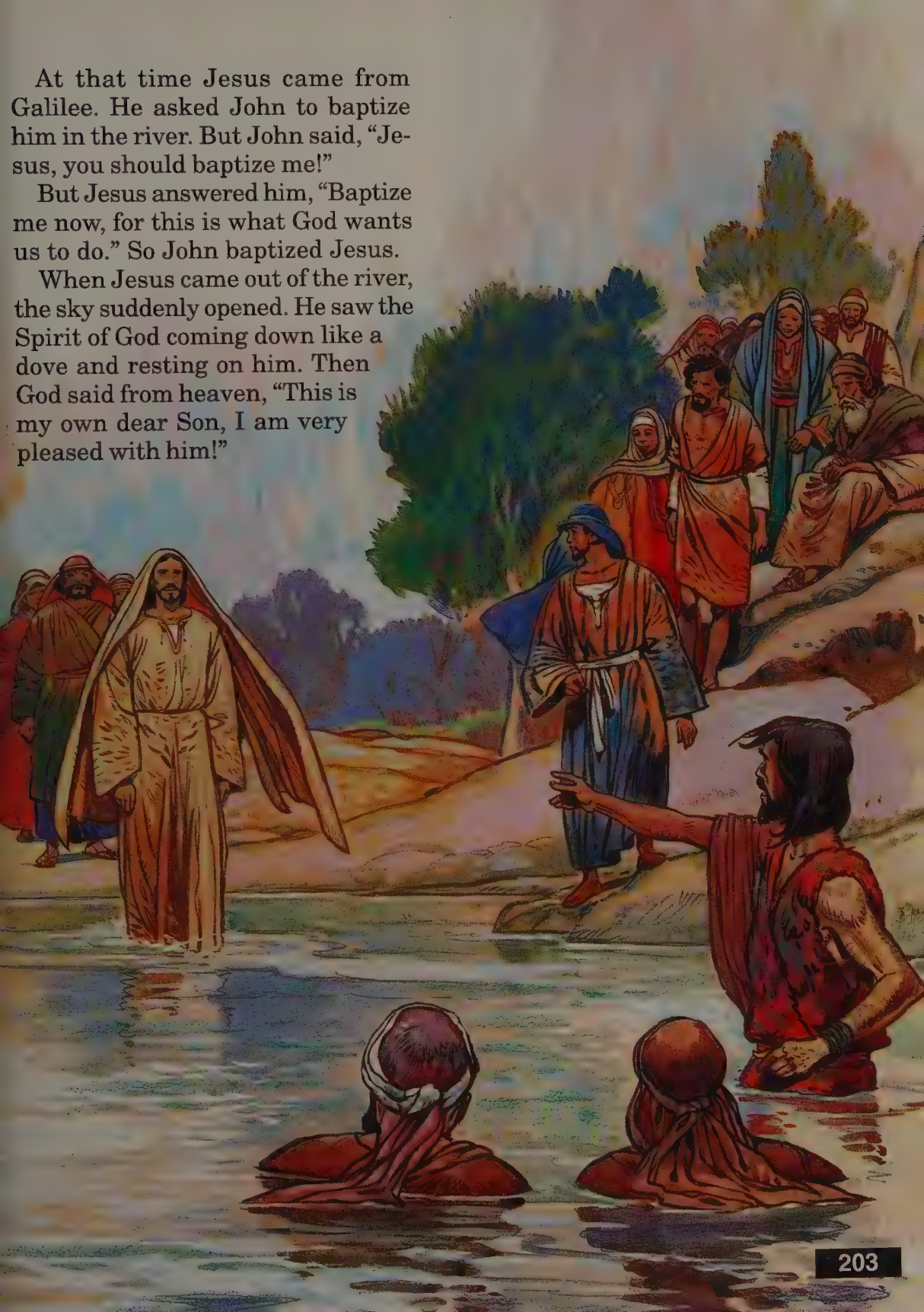
Crowds of people came to John and asked him to baptize them. He said, "You snakes! You are bad! Do things which will make God happy."

John baptizes Jesus

Matthew 3.4-6,13-17

John had clothes made of camel's hair and a leather belt. He ate locusts and honey. People came to him from all parts of the country. They came from the city of Jerusalem, the district of Judea, and from the valley near the River Jordan. In front of John they told God that they had done evil things.





At that time Jesus came from Galilee. He asked John to baptize him in the river. But John said, "Jesus, you should baptize me!"

But Jesus answered him, "Baptize me now, for this is what God wants us to do." So John baptized Jesus.

When Jesus came out of the river, the sky suddenly opened. He saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. Then God said from heaven, "This is my own dear Son, I am very pleased with him!"

JESUS BEGINS HIS WORK

Jesus is tempted

Matthew 4.1-11

Jesus had very special power. Before he began his work, the Devil tried to make Jesus obey him and not God. This is what happened.

The Spirit of God led Jesus into a wild and lonely place. Jesus spent 40 days and nights without food. He was hungry. Then the Devil tempted him. The Devil told him, "You are God's Son. Why not turn these stones into bread!"

But Jesus answered, "The Holy Book says, We need more than bread to live. We need to listen to God and obey him. "

Next the Devil took Jesus to the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem. He said to him, "You are God's Son. Jump down. The Holy Book says,

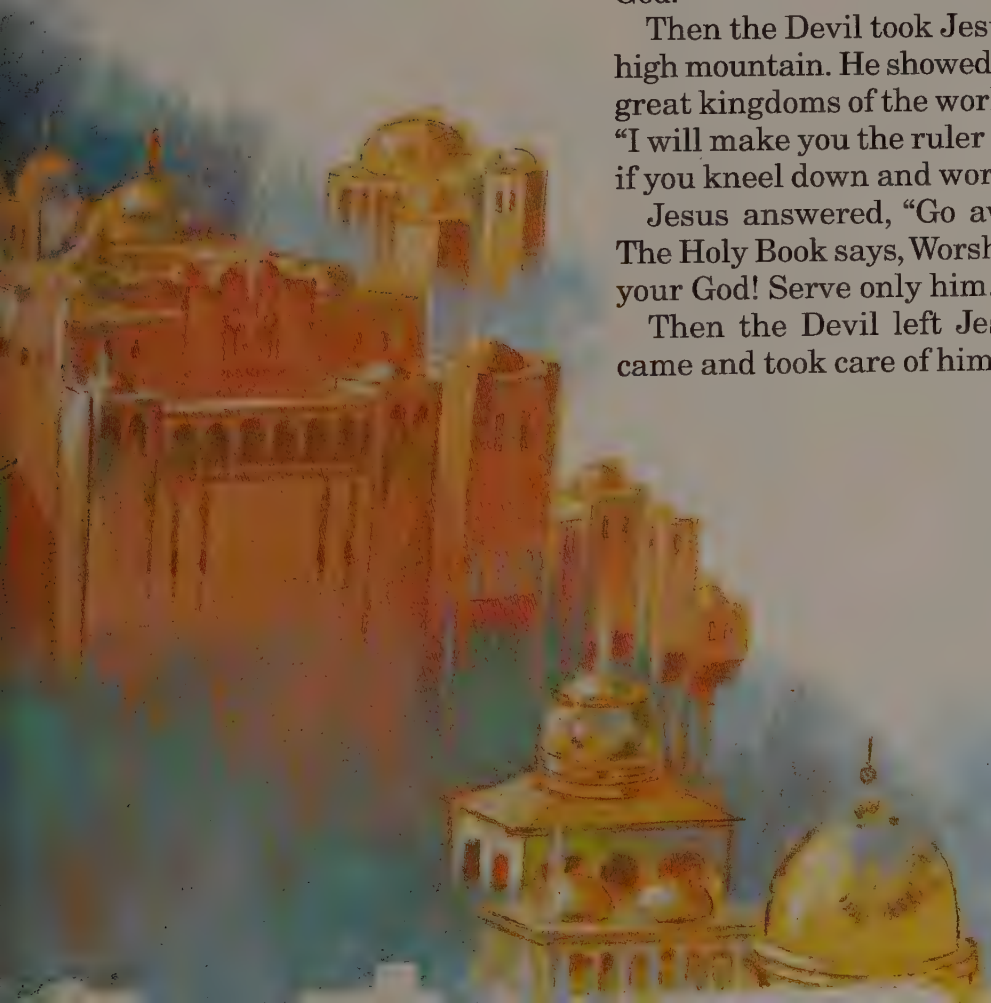
God will order his angels to hold you,
so you will not be hurt."

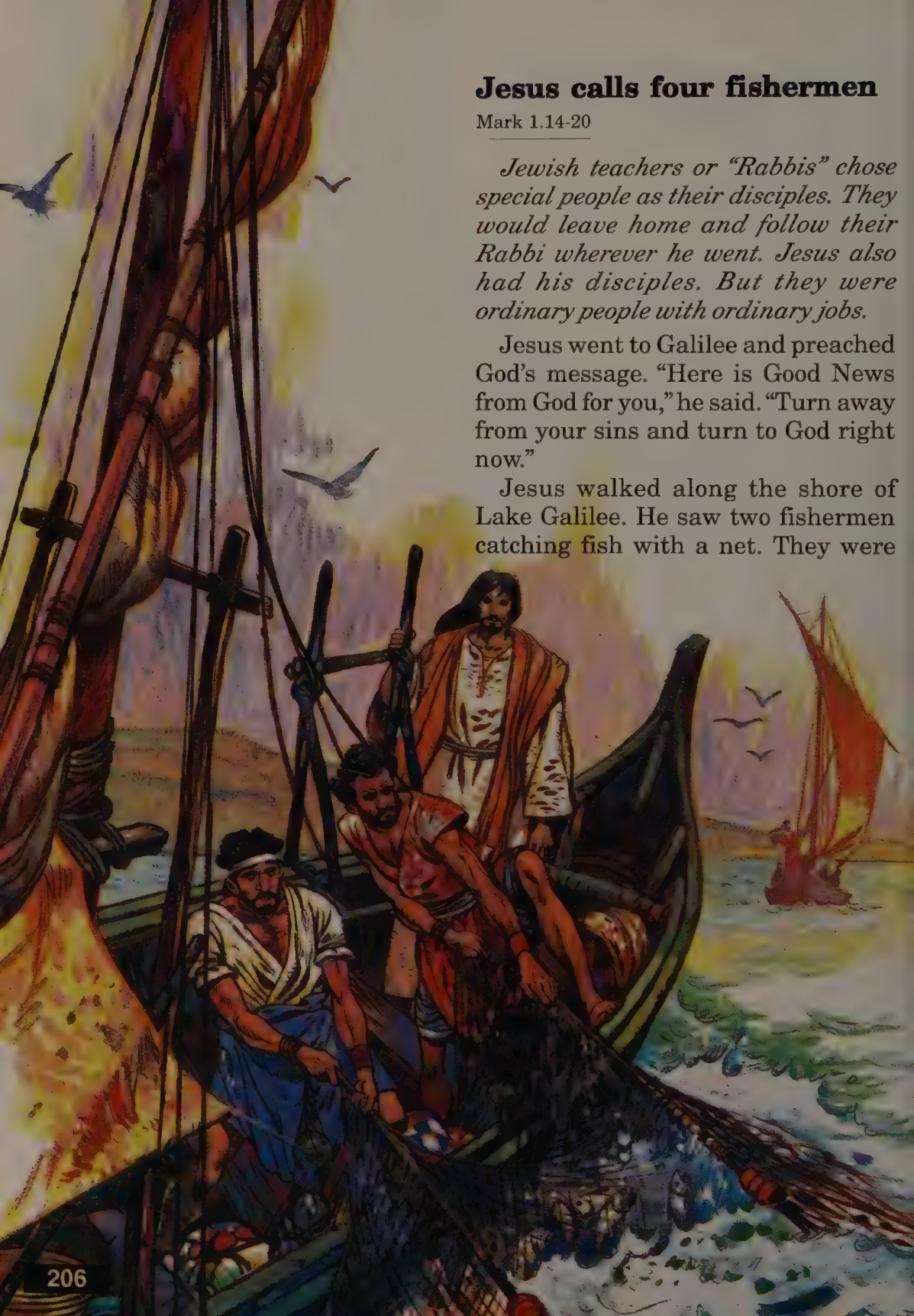
Jesus answered, "But the Holy Book also says, Don't test the Lord your God."

Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain. He showed him all the great kingdoms of the world and said, "I will make you the ruler of all these, if you kneel down and worship me."

Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan! The Holy Book says, Worship the Lord your God! Serve only him."

Then the Devil left Jesus. Angels came and took care of him.





Jesus calls four fishermen

Mark 1.14-20

Jewish teachers or "Rabbis" chose special people as their disciples. They would leave home and follow their Rabbi wherever he went. Jesus also had his disciples. But they were ordinary people with ordinary jobs.

Jesus went to Galilee and preached God's message. "Here is Good News from God for you," he said. "Turn away from your sins and turn to God right now."

Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee. He saw two fishermen catching fish with a net. They were

Simon and his brother Andrew. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I will teach you to be different kind of fishermen." At once they left their nets and went with him.

Jesus went a little further and saw two other brothers, James and John, Zebedee's sons. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. Jesus called them too. At once they left their father in the boat with the servants, and went with Jesus.

Jesus calls a tax collector

Matthew 9.9-13

Tax collectors worked for the Roman rulers. They collected extra taxes and grew rich. The Jews never liked them.

Jesus was on his way from Capernaum. He saw Matthew, a tax collector, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, "Come with me!"

Matthew got up and followed him.

Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples for a meal in his house. Many tax collectors and other men who were also not liked by the people were there. They joined Jesus and his disciples at the table. Some Pharisees saw this and asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such bad people?" Jesus heard them and answered, "People who are well do not need a doctor. Only those who are sick need him. The Holy Book says, I want people to be kind to others more than I want animal offerings. Think about this. I have come to help people who know they are bad, not those who think they are good!"

THE APOSTLES

Jesus chooses the twelve apostles

Mark 3.13-19

The word "apostle" means someone who is sent out to do a special job for God. Jesus chose twelve men to do just that. He spent about three years with them. When he left them, they told everyone who Jesus was and what he did.

Jesus went up a hill. He asked certain men to go with him. From them he chose twelve to be his special helpers (apostles). "You are my special friends," he told them. "You will stay with me. I will send you out to speak God's message. You will have power to send demons out of people."

The twelve apostles are:

Andrew and his brother Simon (Jesus called him Peter), James and John, the two sons of Zebedee (Jesus called them "men of thunder"), Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James (the son of Alphaeus) and Thaddaeus, Simon (a freedom-fighter), and Judas Iscariot (who handed over Jesus to his enemies).

Jesus cares for people

Matthew 9.36-38

When Jesus saw the crowds, he was sorry for them. They were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "There are many people to be brought to God, but only few workers to do this. Pray that God will send more workers to bring in people."

JESUS SHOWS GOD'S POWER

The wedding at Cana

John 2.1-12

Plenty of grapes are grown in Palestine. Wine is commonly used at meals. At a wedding in Cana, Jesus did a miracle by turning water into wine. A miracle is a wonderful sign from God. It shows God's power and his care for people.

There was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus and his disciples were invited. His mother also was there. Soon the wine was finished. Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine!"

"Mother, you need not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "I will do something at the right time."

Jesus' mother then told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

There were six large water jars kept for special use. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill these jars with water!" They filled them to the top. Then he said, "Now take some to the man in charge of the feast." They did so. He tasted it and found it to be wine. He did not know where this wine had come from. But, of course, the servants who had drawn the water knew. So he called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everywhere people serve the best wine first. After the guests have drunk a lot, the ordinary wine is served. But you have kept the best wine until now!"

This was the first miracle that Jesus did. It showed God's power, and his followers believed in him.

The man with a demon

Mark 1.21-28

A "synagogue" is a place of worship for the Jews. There they also learn about God every Sabbath day. A Rabbi reads and teaches from the Holy Book and often answers questions.

Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Capernaum. On the next Sabbath day, Jesus went to the synagogue. He began to teach the people. They were amazed at the way he taught. He was not like other religious teachers. He taught in God's name.

Just then a man with a demon came into the synagogue. He screamed, "Jesus of Nazareth, are you going to destroy us? I know who you are. You are from God!"

Jesus ordered the demon, "Be quiet! Come out of him!"

The demon shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him. The people were all amazed. They said to one another, "What is this? Is it a new teaching? This man has power over the demons! They obey him!"

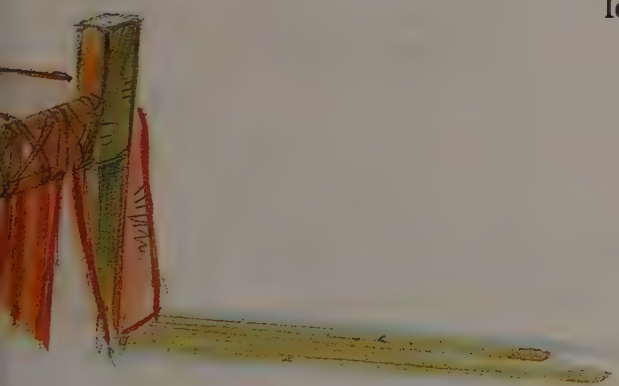
So the news about Jesus spread quickly all over Galilee.

Many are healed

Mark 1.29-34

Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, and the other disciples. He went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew. He was told that Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever. So he went to her. He held her hand and helped her to stand up. The fever immediately left her, and she looked after the guests.

In the evening people came to Jesus with the sick and those who had demons. All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. Jesus healed many who were sick, and sent out many demons. The demons knew who he was. But he would not let them say anything.



Jesus prays and preaches

Mark 1.35-39

Very early the next morning, Jesus left the house. He went to a lonely place and prayed. But Simon and his friends went out looking for him. When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

Jesus answered, "We must go and speak about God in the other villages nearby. That is why I came."

So he went all over Galilee. He preached in the synagogues and sent out demons.

Jesus heals a man with leprosy

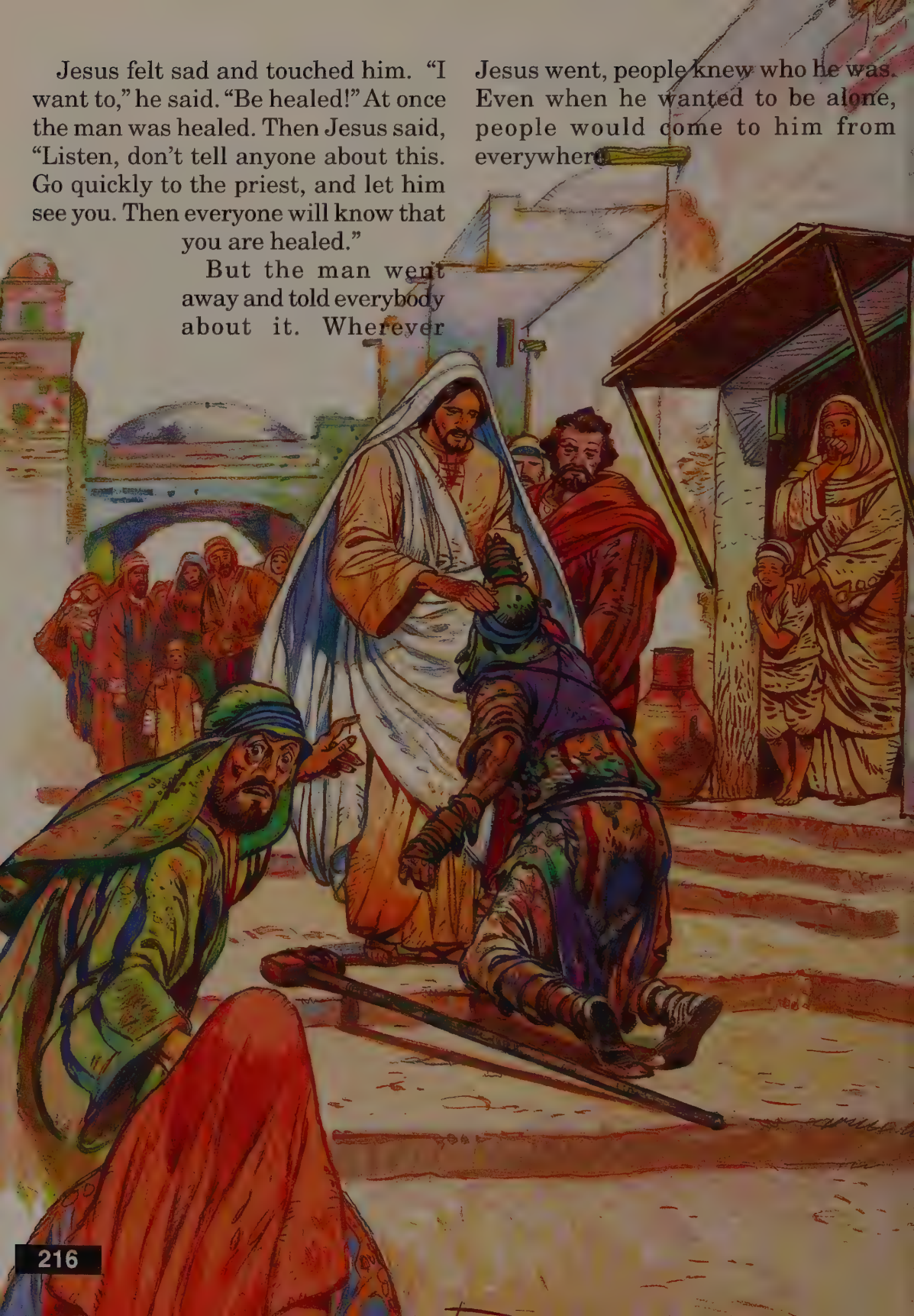
Mark 1.40-45

Leprosy is a bad skin disease. People with this disease live separately. They think that it is God's punishment. In Palestine some types of leprosy got cured naturally. The priest had to check up such a person. He decided whether or not the disease had gone. Only then the person could go back.

A man suffering from leprosy came and knelt before Jesus. "Jesus, if you want to," he begged, "you can heal me."

Jesus felt sad and touched him. "I want to," he said. "Be healed!" At once the man was healed. Then Jesus said, "Listen, don't tell anyone about this. Go quickly to the priest, and let him see you. Then everyone will know that you are healed."

But the man went away and told everybody about it. Wherever Jesus went, people knew who he was. Even when he wanted to be alone, people would come to him from everywhere.



Jesus heals a paralysed man

Mark 2.1-12

In Palestine the houses usually had flat roofs made of thick sticks covered with mud.

A few days later Jesus went back to the house at Capernaum. News spread that he was there. A large crowd came together. Soon there was no place, even at the front door. Jesus was giving them God's message. Four men came carrying a man on a mat. He was paralysed. The men could not get near Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof. It was right above where Jesus stood. Then they let the man down lying on his mat. Jesus knew how much they trusted him. He said to the sick man, "My son, I forgive your sins."

Some religious teachers sitting there thought, "Does this man think he is God? Only God can forgive sins! He is insulting God!"

At once Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said to them, "Why do you think such things? It's easier for me to say to this paralysed man, I forgive your sins. It's not so easy to say, Get up, pick up your mat, and walk. But you must know the power on earth of the One who became man. He can forgive sins and heal." Then he said to the man, "Get up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

While everyone watched, the man got up. He picked up his mat and hurried away. They were all so amazed. They praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Jesus calms the storm

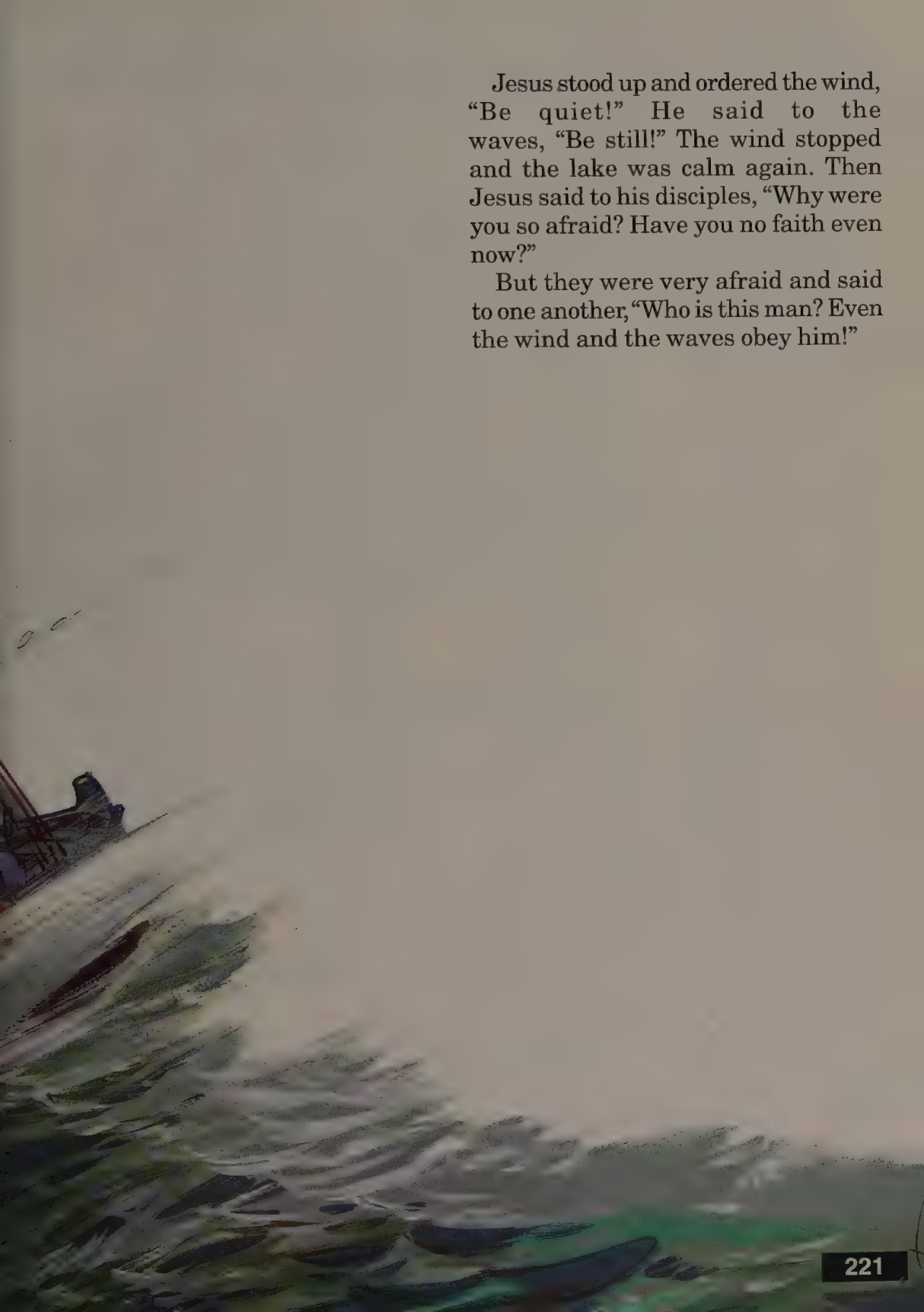
Mark 4.35-41

Lake Galilee is about 21 kilometres long and 13 kilometres wide. It is well-known for sudden storms.

One evening Jesus got into a boat and said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they left the crowd and went with him. Other boats also were with them. Suddenly a strong wind blew. Soon the waves began to fill the boat. Jesus was sleeping in the back of the boat, with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, "Master, don't you care? We are about to die!"

Jesus stood up and ordered the wind, "Be quiet!" He said to the waves, "Be still!" The wind stopped and the lake was calm again. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why were you so afraid? Have you no faith even now?"

But they were very afraid and said to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"



THE TRUE FOLLOWERS

Jesus' true family

Mark 3.31-35

One day a crowd was sitting with Jesus inside a house. Then Jesus' mother arrived with his brothers and sisters. Standing outside the house, they sent someone in to call him. "Your mother, brothers and sisters are outside looking for you," they said to Jesus.

"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Jesus asked. He looked at the people around him and said, "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! All who obey God are my brothers, my sisters, and my mother."

Some did not follow him

Mark 6.1-6

Jesus went back to his home town with his disciples. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there. When they heard him, they were all amazed. "Where did he learn all this?" they asked. "How did he become so wise? How does he do such miracles? Isn't he just a carpenter, the son of Mary? Isn't he the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters also living here?" So they did not want to listen to him anymore.

Jesus said to them, "It is true that anyone who speaks for God gets no respect from his own people."

So he could not do any miracles there. He only touched and healed a few sick people. Jesus was amazed that the people did not have faith in God.

Women who followed Jesus

Luke 8.1-3

At that time most people thought women were not important. The Jewish teachers did not allow women to be their followers. But Jesus made no difference between men and women.

Jesus travelled through towns and villages. He preached the Good News about God's rule. His twelve disciples went with him. Some women also went along. He had healed them of demons and sickness. Mary, called Magdalene, once had seven demons. Joanna, wife of Chuza, an officer in King Herod's court, Susanna, and many other women also followed him. They used what they had to help Jesus and his disciples.

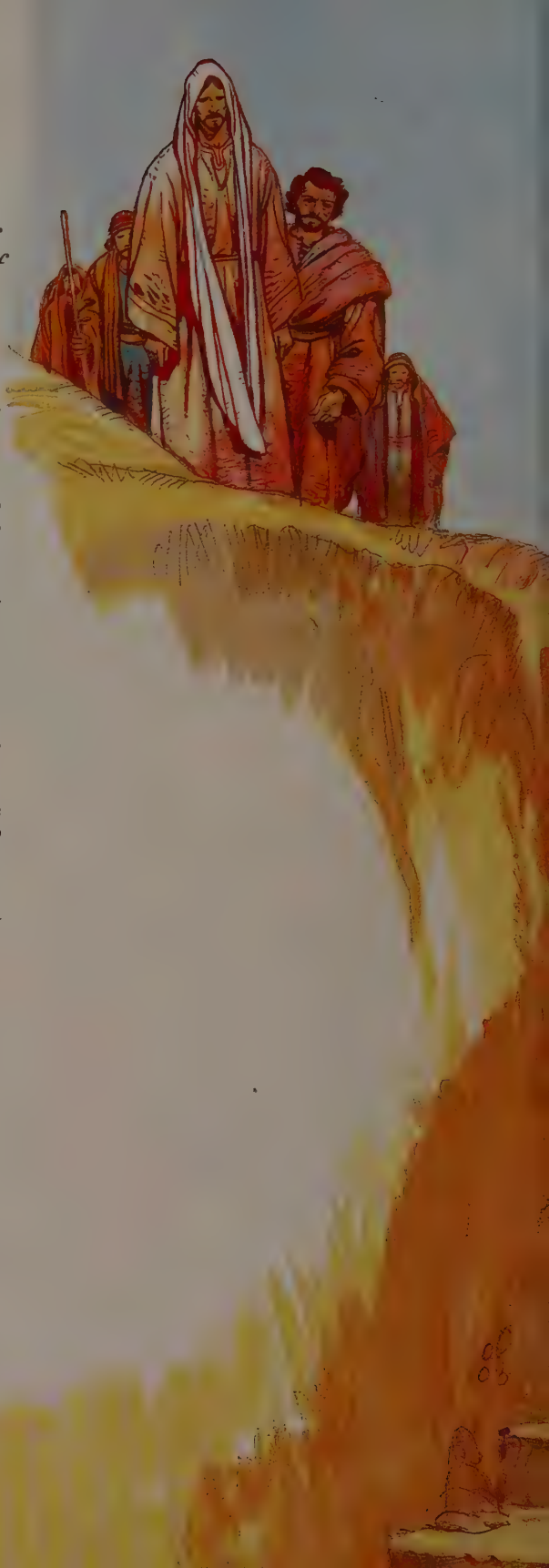
No turning back!

Luke 9.57-62

Many people wanted to follow Jesus. But he made it clear to them that this would often be difficult. So many of them went back.

One day Jesus and his disciples were on their way. A man met them and said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests. But the One who became man has no place even to rest!" He said to another man, "Follow me!" But that man replied, "Sir, let me stay at home until my father dies. After I bury him, I will follow you." Jesus answered, "Don't worry. It will be taken care of! You go and tell people about God and his ways." Another man said, "I will follow you, sir. But first let me go and say good-bye to my family." Jesus said to him, "God can't use anyone who begins to follow me and then turns back!



THE GOOD NEWS SPREADS

A dead girl lives again

Mark 5.21-43

Jesus returned to the other side of Lake Galilee. A large crowd gathered around him. Jairus, who was in charge of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet. He said, "My little daughter is very sick. Please come and touch her. Then she will get well and live!"

Jesus went with Jairus. A large crowd was there. People were pushing on every side.

There was a woman who had very bad bleeding for twelve years. She had been to many doctors, and had spent all her money. Instead of getting better, she got worse. She had heard about Jesus, and stood in the crowd behind him. She said to herself, "If I could just touch his garment, I will get well."

Then she touched his garment, and her bleeding stopped at once! She knew she was well again. Suddenly Jesus felt that his power had healed someone. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my garment?"

His disciples answered, So many people are pushing around you. How can you ask who touched you?"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who it was. The woman who was healed came up, trembling with fear.

She fell at his feet, and told him everything. Jesus said to her, "My daughter, because you believed in me, you are well. Go in peace! You will be all right."

While Jesus was saying this, some men came from Jairus' house and said, "Your daughter is dead. Don't trouble the Master any longer."

Jesus did not listen to them. He told Jairus, "Don't worry, only believe in God." Then he called Peter, James and John to go with him. When they came to Jairus' house, people were crying loudly. Jesus went inside and said, "Why all this noise and crying? The child is not dead. She is only sleeping!"

But they laughed at him. So he sent them all out. He took the child's parents and his three disciples into the child's room. He held her hand and said to her, "Talitha, koum," which means, "Little girl, get up!"

At once she got up and started walking around. She was twelve years old. People could not believe what happened! Jesus said, "Give her something to eat. Be sure you don't tell anyone about this."

Go and tell!

Mark 6.7-11

Jesus called his twelve disciples and said, "Go out two by two. I give you power over demons. Don't take any food or money or extra clothes. Have sandals and walking sticks, but take nothing more. If people are happy to have you in their house, stay until you leave that place. If in any town people are not happy to listen to you, leave and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a warning to them of God's punishment."

Jesus feeds more than 5,000

John 6.1-15

Jesus went across Lake Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they had seen his miracles of healing. Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. The time for the Passover Festival was near. Jesus looked round and saw a large crowd coming. So he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" (He said this to test Philip. Jesus already knew what he would do.)

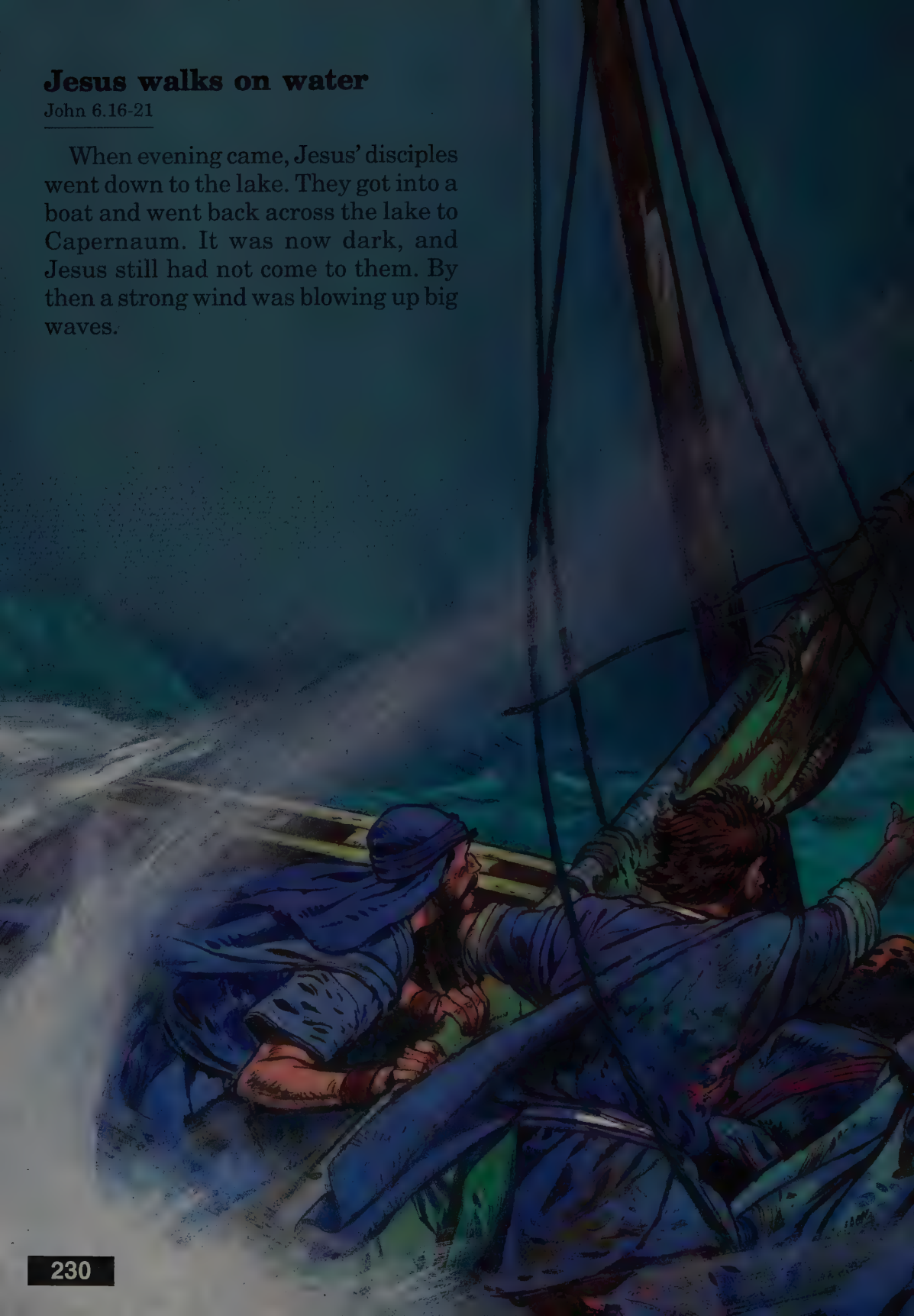
Philip answered, "We would need more than 200 silver coins to buy enough bread for everyone to have just a little." Another of his disciples, Andrew, said, "There is a boy here, who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But that won't be enough for all these people!" "Make the people sit down on the grass," Jesus told them. So all the people sat down. The men alone were about 5,000. Jesus took the bread, thanked God, and gave it to everyone. He did the same with the fish. They all had as much as they wanted. Jesus said to his disciples, "Gather the left-over pieces. Let's not waste any." So they gathered them all up and filled twelve baskets. The people who saw this miracle said, "Surely this is the Prophet we have been waiting for!"

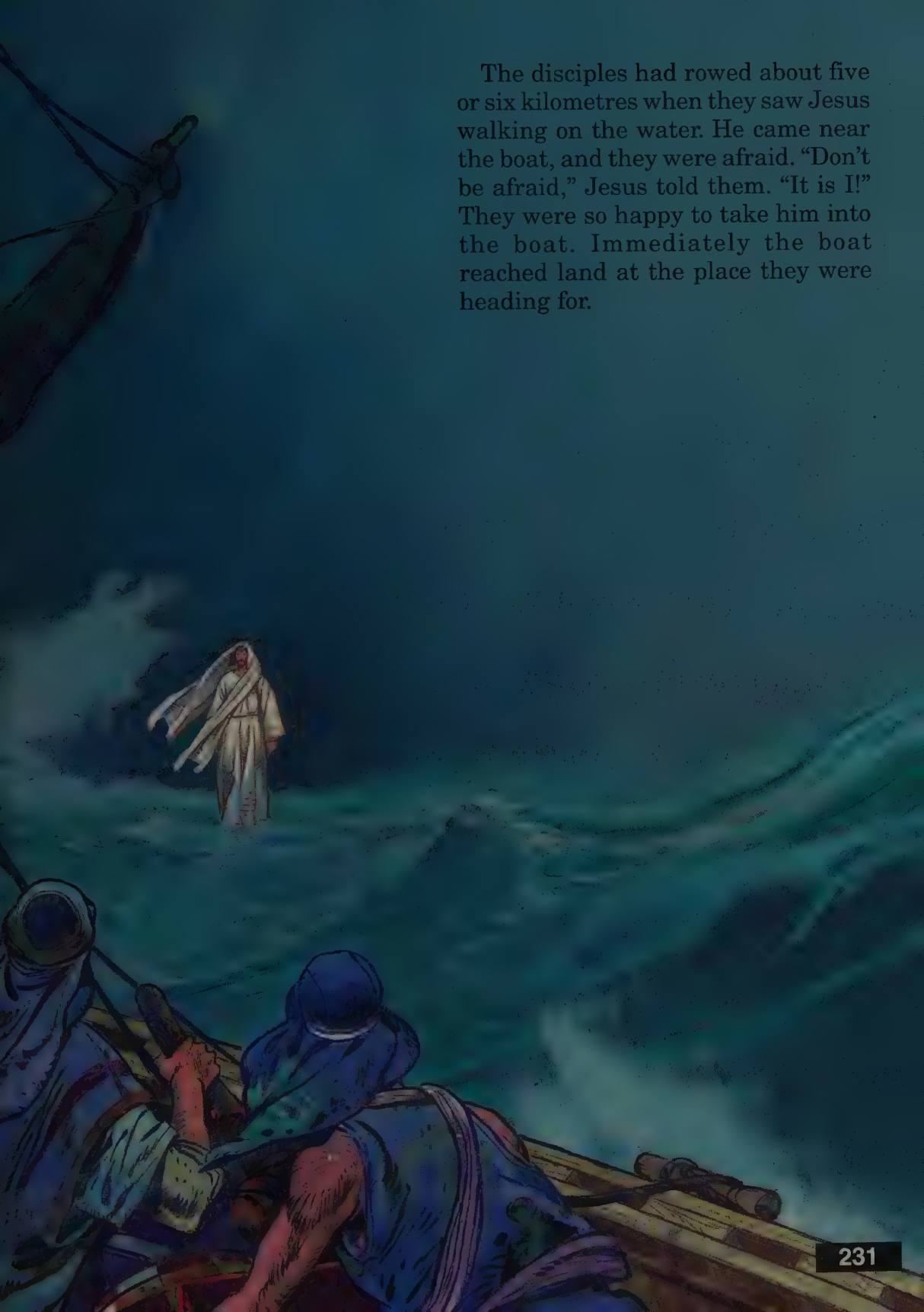
Jesus knew that they would force him to become their King. So he went off again to the hills by himself.

Jesus walks on water

John 6.16-21

When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the lake. They got into a boat and went back across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus still had not come to them. By then a strong wind was blowing up big waves.



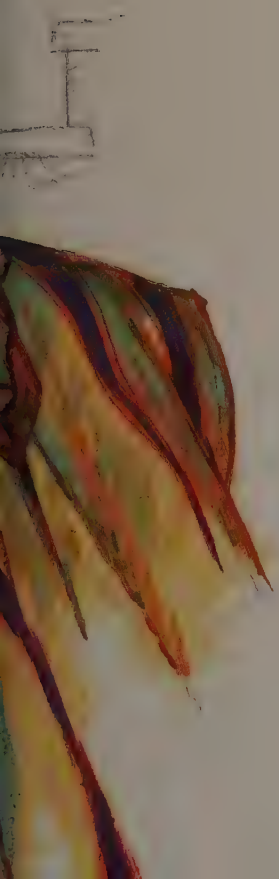


The disciples had rowed about five or six kilometres when they saw Jesus walking on the water. He came near the boat, and they were afraid. "Don't be afraid," Jesus told them. "It is I!" They were so happy to take him into the boat. Immediately the boat reached land at the place they were heading for.

Jesus goes across the lake

Mark 6.53-56

Jesus and his disciples crossed the lake and landed at Gennesaret. When they got out of the boat, the people knew Jesus at once. Wherever he went, people ran after him. They begged him to let the sick at least touch the edge of his garment. All who touched him were healed.



A woman at the sea coast

Mark 7.24-30

The Jews were proud to be Abraham's descendants. They sometimes thought of non-Jews as "dogs". Left-over food is usually given to dogs.

Jesus first wanted to help his own people, the Jews. But they did not always listen to him. So sometimes Jesus would go outside the Jewish part of Palestine. The woman in this story was not a Jew. Jesus' reply to her request was only to test her!

One day Jesus went to a village near the city of Tyre. He wanted to be away from the crowds. So he went into a house. But soon a woman heard about him. She came and fell at his feet. Her daughter had a demon in her. The woman was not a Jew. She begged Jesus to send the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus answered, "I have to look after my own people. It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." "Sir," she answered, "the dogs eat the children's left-overs under the table!"

Jesus said to her, "Because of that answer, go back home. You will find that the demon has gone out of your daughter!"

She went home, and found her daughter lying on the bed. The demon had left her.

A deaf and dumb man

Mark 7.31-37

Jesus left that place and went to Lake Galilee. He went through the district of the Ten Towns. Some people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and dumb. They begged Jesus to heal him. So Jesus took him away from the crowd. He put his fingers in the man's ears. He touched the man's tongue with spit. Then Jesus looked up to heaven, groaned deeply and said to the man, "Open up!"

At once the man was able to hear and speak without any trouble. Then Jesus ordered the people not to tell anyone. But they told everyone. All who heard were completely amazed. "How well he does everything!" they said. "He can even make the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!"

The Roman officer's servant

Luke 7.1-10

Here is another story which again shows that Jesus cared for everybody.

Jesus went to Capernaum. A Roman officer there had a servant whom he liked very much. The servant was sick and about to die.

When the officer heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish leaders to him. They came and begged Jesus, "Please help this man. He loves our people, and has built a synagogue for us."

Jesus went with them. Before he reached the officer's house, he sent friends to tell Jesus, "Sir, don't trouble yourself. I am not good enough for you to come into my house. That is why I sent others. If you just give the order, my servant will get well. I myself obey the orders of my senior officers. I have soldiers under me. I order this one, Go! and he goes. I order that one,come! and he comes. I order my slave, Do this! and he does it."

Jesus was amazed to hear this. He turned around and said to the crowd, "I tell you, even among our people I have never found faith like this!"

The leaders went back to the officer's house and found his servant well.

The widow's son

Luke 7.11-17

One day Jesus and his disciples went to a town named Nain. A large crowd was with him. At the gate of the town they met a burial procession. The only son of a widow had died. When the Lord Jesus saw the weeping mother, he felt very sad.

He said to her, "Don't cry." Then he walked over and touched the stretcher. The men carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Son, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk. Jesus gave him back to his mother.

The people were amazed and praised God. They said, "A great man of God is here! God has come to help his people!"

This news about Jesus spread through all the country and nearby places.

A message from prison

Luke 7.18-23

King Herod had put John in prison for speaking openly against him. In prison John had a lot of time to think about what Jesus was doing. He wanted to believe that Jesus was the Saviour whom God had promised.

John the Baptist's followers told him about what Jesus was doing. He sent two of them to ask Jesus:

"Are you the Saviour whom God promised, or should we look for someone else?"

At that time Jesus was healing many people of all kinds of diseases. He was also sending out demons and helping the blind to see. He answered John's men, "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind can see. The lame can walk. The deaf can hear. Those with leprosy are healed. The dead are brought back to life. God's Good News is told to the poor. How happy are those who believe in me!"

Jesus at the home of a Pharisee

Luke 7.36-50

In Palestine certain customs were followed to welcome a guest. First a servant would wash the guest's feet. Then the host would put a drop of scented oil on his forehead and kiss him.

Simon's pride did not allow him to welcome Jesus in the usual way!

One day, Simon, a Pharisee, invited Jesus to eat with him. There was a woman in that town who was known

to be bad. She heard that Jesus was a guest in Simon's house. She brought a white stone jar full of costly scent, and stood behind Jesus crying. Her tears wet his feet. Then she dried his feet with her hair, and poured the scent on them. When Simon saw this, he thought, "How can this man allow a bad woman to touch him? He cannot be from God!"

Jesus said to him, "Simon, may I tell you something"

"Yes, Master," he replied "tell me."

Jesus said, "There were two men who owed money to a moneylender.

One owed him 500 silver coins, and the other 50. Both of them said they could not pay him back. So he let them off. Who do you think would love him more?"

"I think," answered Simon, "the one who owed him more."

"You are right," said Jesus. Then he looked at the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I came to your home, you gave me no water to wash my feet. But she washed my feet with her tears, and dried them with her hair. You gave me no welcome kiss. But she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came. You did not even put oil on my head, but she has covered my feet with scent. I tell you, the great love she has shown proves that her sins have been forgiven. Whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love!"

Then Jesus said to the woman, "I forgive your sins." The others sitting at the table began to say to themselves, "Who is this, who forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Because you believe in me, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace!"

Jesus at a wedding party

Luke 14.7-11

At wedding parties in Palestine there were no reserved seats. Usually the very important guests would sit near the bride and groom. Sometimes people would try to make themselves look important by taking the front seats.

Jesus was at a wedding party. He saw how some of the guests were choosing the best seats. So he told them: "When you go to a wedding party, do not choose the best seat. Your host may ask you to give your seat to a very important guest. Then you will have to take a back seat and will feel bad in front of the others.

"So when you are at a party, it is better to sit at the back. Let your host invite you and say, Please come to the front. Then you will be honoured in front of the other guests. Any who think themselves important will be humbled. But any who humble themselves will be honoured."

Jesus and Zacchaeus

Luke 19.1-10

You have already read why tax collectors were hated by the Jewish people. Here is the story of a tax collector, who became a new man!

Jesus was passing through Jericho. In this town there lived a man named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector and was very rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but could not, because he was very short. So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree. He knew Jesus would come that way. As Jesus passed by, he looked up and saw Zacchaeus on the tree. "Zacchaeus, come down quickly," he said. "I must stay in your house today."

Zacchaeus came down quickly. He gladly took Jesus home. The people who saw this were upset. They said, "Jesus is going to stay with a bad man!"

Zacchaeus stood up and said to Jesus, "Sir, I will give half of my things to the poor. I will pay back four times as much to those I have cheated."

Jesus said to him, "Zacchaeus, today God has saved you and your family. For you also belong to the family of Abraham. The One who became man came to seek sinners and save them!"

A man born blind

John 9.1-11

Even today many people think that blindness or any other handicap is punishment for sins.

Jesus and his followers saw a blind man begging by the roadside. He had been blind from birth. They asked him, "Master, whose sin made this man to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?"

Jesus answered, "It is not because of his sins or his parents' sins. But God's power will be seen in him. We must do the work of God who sent me while there is time. While I am in the world, I am the light for the world."

Then Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with it. He put the mud on the man's eyes. He told him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam." So the man went, washed and came back. He was able to see!

His neighbours, and the people who had seen him begging, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit there and beg?"

Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't. He just looks like him." So the man himself said, "I am the man."

"How is it that you can now see?" they asked him.

He answered, "The man called Jesus made some mud, put it on my eyes, and told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went, and as soon as I washed, I could see."

Stories told by Jesus

Often Jesus told a story to make people think or to answer a question. He told these stories to people who did not follow God's ways. He wanted them to know that God loves and cares for them. He wanted them to come back to God. That would make God happy indeed.

LOST AND FOUND

The lost sheep

Luke 15.1-7

It was easy to lose sheep among the rocky hills of Palestine. Shepherds cared for the sheep and were clever in finding lost animals. The sheep would often belong to some villagers. Everybody was always happy when the shepherd brought back a lost sheep.

One day Jesus was teaching a large group of people. Among them were many tax collectors and others who were not religious. The Pharisees and the religious teachers started grumbling, "This man receives such bad people and even eats with them!" So Jesus told them these stories:

"Suppose a man has 100 sheep and loses one of them. What does he do? He leaves the other 99 sheep and goes looking for the lost one. When he finds it, he is so happy. He carries it back home on his shoulders. Then he calls his friends and neighbours and says to them, 'I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us have a party!'

In the same way, God will surely be happy when one person stops doing evil and turns to him. He will not be so happy with those who think they are too good to turn to God!"

The lost coin

Luke 15.8-10

Married women would wear ten silver coins on their fore-head. It was an important sign of being married. A woman would be very upset if one of the coins got lost.

"Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one of them. What does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps her house, and looks carefully everywhere. When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours, and says to them, 'I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us have a party!'

In the same way, the angels of God are surely happy when one person stops doing evil and turns to God!"

The lost son

Luke 15.11-32

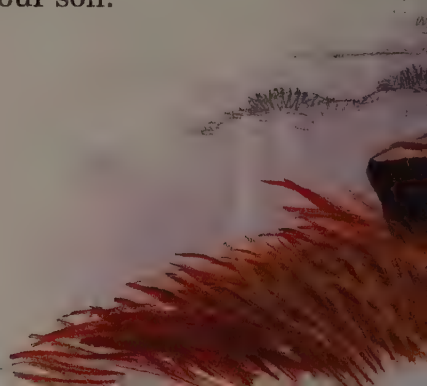
"Once there was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to him, 'Father, give me my share of your things now.' So the man divided everything between his two sons.

After a few days, the younger son sold all his things and left home with the money. He went to a far country, and spent all his money foolishly.

Now there was a great famine in that country, and he had nothing. So he went to work for a farmer, who sent him to look after his pigs. He was so hungry that he felt like eating the pigs' food. But no one gave him anything! Now he became wise and said, At home even my father's daily workers have more than they can eat, but here I am starving! I will go to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. You can no longer call me your son. Take me as one of your daily workers."

So he went on his way to his father.

"When he was still some distance from home, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran, put his arms around his son, and kissed him. The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. You can no longer call me your son.'



But the father ordered his servants, 'Hurry! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and make a grand feast. Let us have a party! I thought my son was dead and gone, but he has come back alive. He was lost, but now he has been found.' So the party began.

"Just then the older son was coming back from the field. He heard the music and dancing. So he called a servant and asked, 'What's going on?' 'Your brother has come home safely,' the servant answered. 'So your father is having a big party for him.' The older brother was so angry that he would not go in. His father came out and begged him to come in. But he said, 'All these years I have worked for you like a servant. I have never disobeyed you. What have you given me? Not even a goat to have a party with my friends! But this son of yours has wasted all your money on careless living. Now when he comes back home, you have a big party for him!' The father answered, 'My son, you are always

here with me, and everything I have is yours. But your brother was dead and gone. Now he has come back alive. He was lost, but now he has been found. So we must show our joy in this way.' "

God is like the father in this story. He welcomes people as his children, even when they have gone wrong. The older brother was angry when his brother returned home. But his behaviour showed that he was no better than his foolish brother!

KNOWING GOD'S WAYS

Most countries were ruled by a king. He had full power over everyone in his country. For many years the Jews had waited for the "Kingdom of God". This means a time when God would "rule on earth." These stories told by Jesus help us understand how it would be when this happens.

The wheat and the weeds

Matthew 13.24-30

"When God rules, it will be like this: A farmer sowed good wheat in his field. One night, when everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the seeds of wheat and went away. When the wheat grew and had grain, the weeds showed up. The man's servants said to him, 'Sir, you sowed good seed in your field. Where did the weeds come from?' 'It must be the work of some enemy,' he answered. 'Do you want us to go and pull out the weeds?' they asked him. 'No,' he answered, 'when you take out the weeds, you might pull up the wheat

with them. Let both the wheat and the weeds grow together. At harvest time I will tell the workers to pull out the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them. Then they may gather in the wheat and put it in my store houses.' "

The hidden treasure

Matthew 13.44

We receive something far more precious than gold when we follow God's way.

"Those who follow God's way are like the man in this story. A man found a bag of gold hidden in a field. He was so happy. He covered it up and went home. He then sold everything he had, came back and bought that field."

The great feast

Luke 14.15-24

Many Jews thought that during the Messiah's rule there would be a big party, with lots to eat and drink. At any party in Palestine, servants would be sent out at the last minute to gather the guests from their homes. It was bad manners not to turn up after having agreed to come.

"Once a man wanted to give a big feast, and he invited many people. When it was time for the feast, he sent his servant to tell his guests, 'Come, everything is ready!' But one by one they replied they could not come. The first man told the servant, 'I have bought a field and must go and look at it. Please excuse me.' Another man said, 'I have bought five pairs of oxen

to plough my field. I am on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' The third man said, 'I have just got married. So I can't come.'

The servant went back and told all this to his master. The master was angry and said, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' Soon the servant said, 'I have done what you told me, sir, but there is place for more.' So the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the country roads and lanes and bring in more people to fill all those places. I tell you, none of those men who said they could not come will enjoy my feast!' "

The sower

Luke 8.5-8,11-15

In Palestine people scattered the seed and then ploughed the field. They were never sure that all the seeds would fall in good soil. God's Word is for everyone. But not all will welcome it. Different people receive it in different ways.

"Once a man went out to sow seeds in his field. Some of them fell along the path. People stepped on them, and the birds ate them up. Some of

them fell on rocky ground. When the plants started to grow, they dried up, because there was no water. Some of the seeds fell among thorn bushes, which grew up with the plants and killed them. But some seeds fell in good soil. The plants grew and had plenty of grain."

Jesus ended the story by saying, "Listen and learn, if you want to!"

"This is the meaning of the story: The seed is the word of God. The seeds that fell along the path are those who hear God's word. But the Devil comes and takes the word away from their hearts, so they will not believe and be saved. The seeds that fell on rocky ground are those who hear the word and receive it with joy. But the joy does not last. They believe only for a while, but when there are difficulties, they give up. The seeds that fell among thorn bushes are those who hear. But because they are too worried or love money and enjoyment, they produce nothing. The seeds that fell in good soil are those who hear the word, keep it in their hearts and obey it. They produce a good crop."

BE ALWAYS READY

Jesus had told his disciples that he would come back to them after his death. So he asked them to watch and wait for him. These stories were told to encourage them.

The ten bridesmaids

Matthew 25.1-13

At a Jewish wedding the bridegroom would go to the bride's house in front of a torchlight procession. Sometimes the wedding feast would be held there. Sometimes the procession would go back to the bridegroom's house or move to the couple's new home. Once the joyful party began, no one would be let in. No one knew when the bridegroom would start the procession. Those waiting to join in it had to be ready. Jesus calls on his disciples to be ready for his coming in the same way.

"When God's complete rule takes place, it will be like this: Once ten bridesmaids had to wait for a bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, but the other five were wise. The foolish ones forgot to take any oil for their lamps. But the wise ones took bottles of oil for their lamps. The bridegroom came late, so the maids fell asleep.

"At midnight there was a shout, 'The bridegroom is here! Come and meet him!' The ten maids woke up and lit their lamps. But the lamps of the foolish ones were going out. So they said to the wise ones, 'Let us have some of your oil.' 'No,' the wise ones answered, 'there is not enough for you and for us. Go to the shop and buy for yourselves.' So the foolish ones went off to buy oil. While they were gone, the bridegroom arrived. The five bridesmaids who were ready went in with him to the wedding party, and the door was closed.

"Later the other bridesmaids came back. 'Sir, sir! Let us in!' they shouted. But the bridegroom answered, 'I don't know you.' "

And Jesus said, "Watch out, because you do not know the day or the hour."

The three servants

Matthew 25.14-30

Business people in Palestine used to go on long trips. They would leave their servants in charge of part of their business.

"When God's complete rule takes place on earth, it will be like this: Once a man wanted to go on a journey. He called his servants and asked them to take care of his money. He gave to each one according to what he could do: to one he gave 5,000 gold coins, to another 2,000, and to another 1,000. Then he left on his journey.

The servant who had got 5,000 coins soon put his money in business and earned another 5,000. In the same way, the servant who had got 2,000 coins earned another 2,000. But the servant who had got 1,000 coins dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

"After a long time the master came back. He asked his servants to give their accounts. The servant who had the 5,000 coins came in and handed over another 5,000. 'You gave me 5,000 coins, sir,' he said. 'Look! Here

are another 5,000 I have earned.' 'Well done, you are a good and faithful servant!' said his master. 'You have been faithful in looking after small amounts. So I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in, let us have a party!'

"Then the servant who had 2,000 came in and said, 'You gave me 2,000 coins, sir. Look! Here are another 2,000 I have earned.' 'Well done, you are a good and faithful servant!' said his master. 'You have been faithful in looking after small amounts. So I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in, let us have a party!'

"Then the servant who had the 1,000 coins came in and said, 'Sir, I know you are a difficult person. You want others to work for you and then you enjoy the benefit. I was so afraid of you. I kept your money in the ground. Now here it is. You can take it back.'

"His master replied, 'You are a bad and lazy servant! You knew you had to work for me and give your account, didn't you? Well, then, you should have put my money in the bank. I would have got it all back with interest when I returned. The master then ordered his men to take this servant's money and give it to the one who has 10,000 coins. He also asked them to throw the man out of his presence. Everyone who does something will get more. But those who do nothing will get nothing.'"

KEEP PRAYING

Jesus told three stories to show how we should pray to God. The first two stories teach us that we should keep praying and never give up. In the third story Jesus teaches that we should be humble when we pray.

The friend at midnight

Luke 11.5-8

"Suppose you have a guest coming at midnight. You go to your friend's house and say to him, 'Friend, a guest has just arrived. I don't have any food at home for him. Please lend me three loaves of bread!' Then your friend answers, 'Please don't bother me! The door is locked,

and we are all in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' He is not interested in helping you. So what do you do? You go on asking him. Then he will certainly get up and give you what you need."

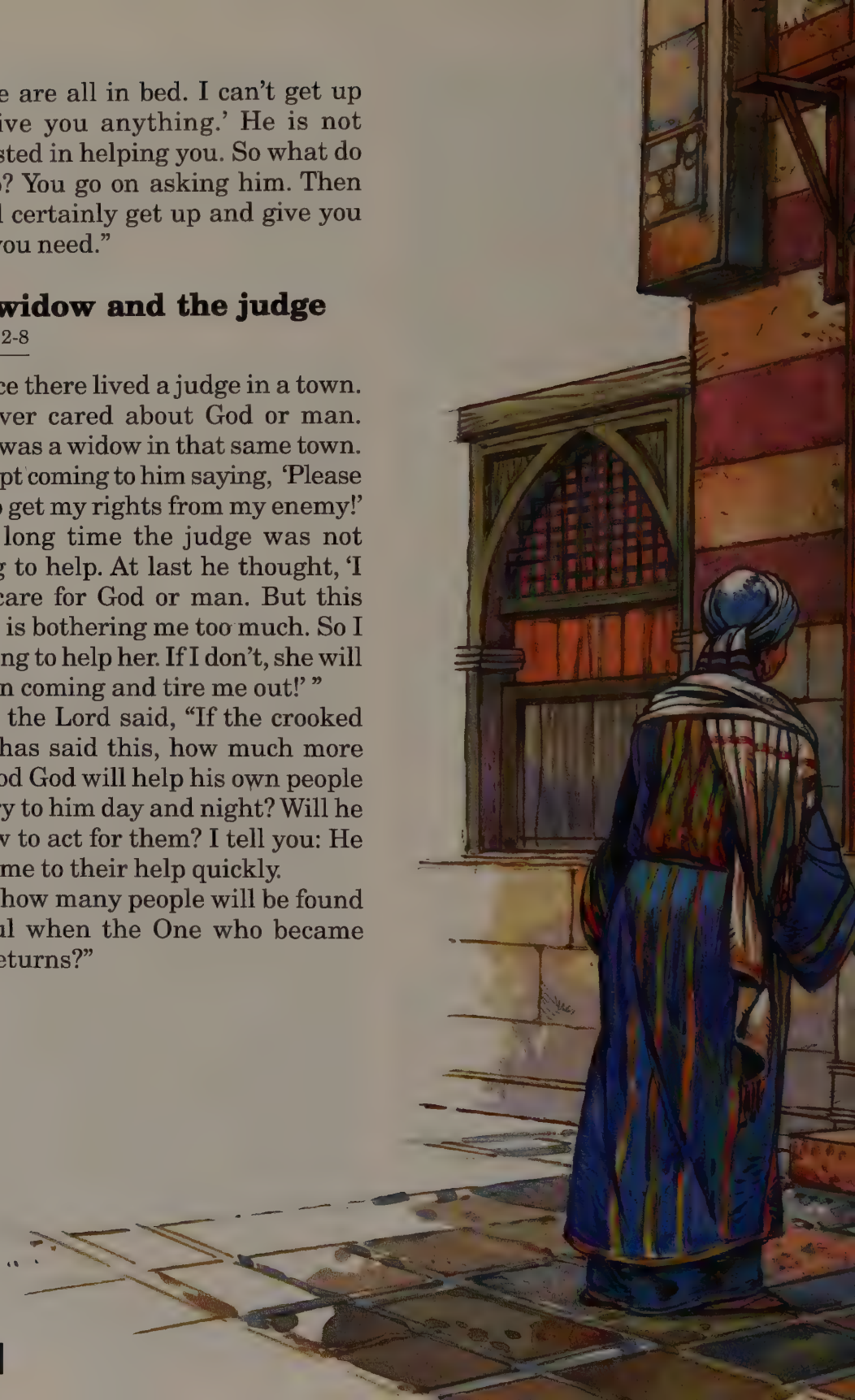
The widow and the judge

Luke 18.2-8

"Once there lived a judge in a town. He never cared about God or man. There was a widow in that same town. She kept coming to him saying, 'Please help to get my rights from my enemy!' For a long time the judge was not willing to help. At last he thought, 'I don't care for God or man. But this widow is bothering me too much. So I am going to help her. If I don't, she will keep on coming and tire me out!' "

And the Lord said, "If the crooked judge has said this, how much more the good God will help his own people who cry to him day and night? Will he be slow to act for them? I tell you: He will come to their help quickly.

But how many people will be found faithful when the One who became man returns?"



The Pharisee and the tax collector

Luke 18.9-14

Jesus also told this story about those who think they are better than others and think badly of everybody else.

"Once two men went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.

"The Pharisee stood in front of everyone and prayed, 'I thank you, God, that I am not greedy, dishonest, or immoral, like everybody else. I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there. I fast two days a week, and I give you one-tenth of everything I earn.'

"But the tax collector stood far away at the back, and would not even look up. He beat his breast in sorrow and said, 'God, have pity on me, a sinner!'

"I tell you," said Jesus, "the tax collector went home forgiven by God. But not the Pharisee. God is not pleased with those who make themselves great. But he is pleased with those who humble themselves."

THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER

These stories ask the question, "Is money more important than God?"

The unforgiving servant

Matthew 18.21-35

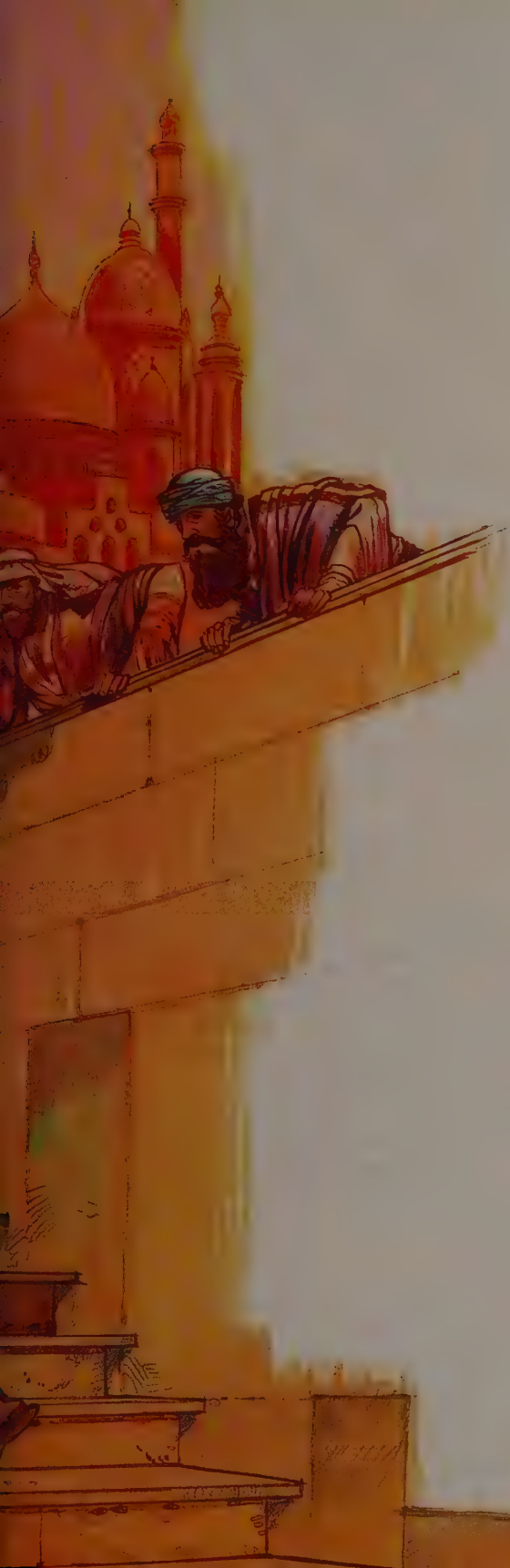
Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on doing wrong to me, how many times should I forgive him? Seven times?"

"No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven. You must always forgive because this is how God deals with us.

"Once a king wanted to check the accounts of his servants. He first called in a servant who owed him a large amount of money. The king ordered, 'Go and sell yourself with your wife and children. The money will be enough to pay what you owe.' The servant fell on his knees before the king. 'Kindly give me more time,' he begged. 'I will pay you everything!' The king felt sorry for him. So he forgave him the debt and let him go free.

"As the man went out, he met another servant. This one owed him a small amount. He held him by the throat and said, 'Pay back what you owe me!' The other servant fell on his knees and begged him, 'Kindly give me some more time, and I will pay you back!' But he refused and put him into jail.

When the other servants heard this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything.



The king got very angry and called the man in. 'You worthless fellow!' he said. 'I had pity on you when you begged me, and I forgave you all the money you owed me. You too should have shown pity to my other servant.' Then he sent the servant to jail until he paid back the whole amount."

Jesus said, "That is how God my Father will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

The rich fool

Luke 12.13-21

The Jews would often go to their Rabbis and ask them to settle their problems.

One day a man in the crowd said to Jesus, "Master, tell my brother to divide my father's property between us." Jesus answered him, "Am I your judge to divide the property between you?"

Then he said this to the crowd, "Be careful not to be greedy. Your life is not made of things you have, even if you are very rich."

Then Jesus told them this story:

"Once there was a rich farmer. He got plenty of crops from his land. He thought like this, 'I don't have enough place in my store-house to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do. 'I will pull down my store-houses and build bigger ones. There I will store the grain and all other crops. I will then be a lucky man! I can have all the good things of life for long. I will have no worry. I can eat, drink and enjoy myself!'

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life. Then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?' "

And Jesus said, "This is what happens to those who think they have everything they need in life, but are poor in God's sight."

The rich man and Lazarus

Luke 16.19-31

It is very important to spend our life on earth as God wants. One day it will be too late to change our ways. People must be warned. There is no second chance after death!

"Once there lived a rich man. He wore very costly clothes. He had plenty of food and everything he needed in life. There was also a beggar named Lazarus, full of sores. Somebody would bring him every day to the rich man's gate, hoping he would feed himself from the leftovers. The dogs would come and lick his sores.

"One day the poor man died and the angels took him to heaven to sit beside Abraham. Later the rich man also died and went to hell. There he was in great pain. He looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, 'Father Abraham! Pity me! Please send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool my tongue. This fire is too much for me!'

"Abraham said, 'My son, remember, in your lifetime you had all the good things. But Lazarus had only bad things. Now he is very happy here, and you are in pain. Besides all that, there is a deep pit between us. Those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so. Nor can anyone cross over to us from your place.'

"The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my home. I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they at least will not come to this horrible place of pain.'

"Abraham said, 'Your brothers have the teachings of Moses and all the other men of God to warn them. Let your brothers listen to them!'

"The rich man answered, 'No, father Abraham! But if someone rises from death and goes to them, they would turn from their sins.'

"Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the other men of God, they will not change their mind even if someone rises from death.' "

The good Samaritan

Luke 10.25-37

The Samaritans lived between Judaea and Galilee in Palestine. Most of the Jews lived in those two districts. The Samaritans were a mixed race. The Jews did not like the Samaritans and looked down upon them.

A religious teacher came to Jesus and tried to get him into trouble. "Master," he asked, "how can I get eternal life?" Jesus asked him, "What does our Holy Book say? How do you understand it?"

The man answered, " 'Love the Lord your God in all that you think and do'; and 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' "

You are right," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will have eternal life."

But the teacher wanted to prove that he was sincere. So he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus told him this story:

"Once a man was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way robbers attacked him. They took

away his clothes, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. Now a priest was coming that way. When he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. A helper in the Temple also came there. He too went over and looked at the man, and then walked by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way saw the man, and was full of pity. He went to him, washed his wounds with oil and wine, and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his donkey, and took him to a rest house. There he took care of him. The next day he gave two silver coins to the manager of the rest house. 'Take care of him,' he told him. 'When I come back, I will pay you whatever you spend on him.' "

Jesus asked, "Which of these three was a true neighbour to the man attacked by the robbers?"

The teacher answered, "The one who was kind to him."

Jesus replied, "All right, you may follow the same example."

Jesus the teacher

Jesus was a very good teacher. He wanted people to think. He used examples from things of daily life. It was the duty of a disciple to remember his master's teaching correctly and pass it on to others. Here we have some examples of what Jesus taught.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

This is a very famous collection of teachings Jesus gave from the top of a hill. They tell us how Jesus wanted his followers to behave. Much of what he said was quite different from anything people had heard before.

Be like salt

Matthew 5.13

Salt is now mainly used for flavouring. But before we had fridges, salt was used to stop food from going bad.

"You are to be like salt for everyone. But if salt loses its taste, it cannot be made salty again. It would be useless."

Be like light

Matthew 5.14-16

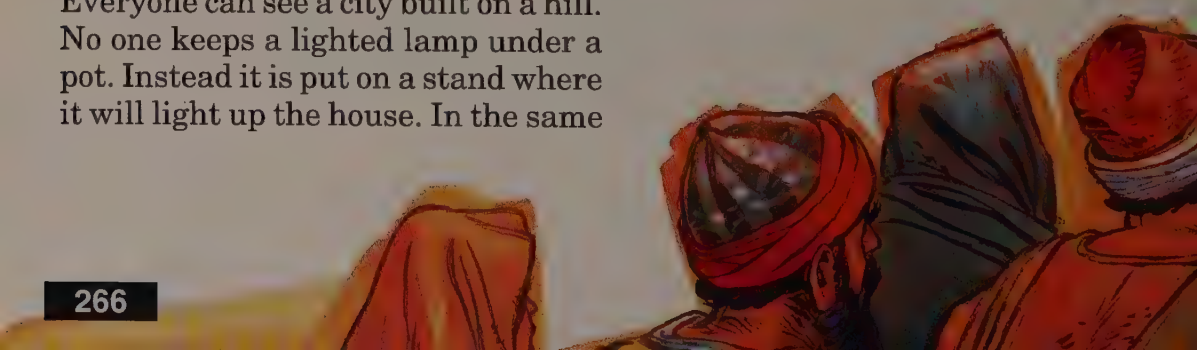
"You are to be like light to others. Everyone can see a city built on a hill. No one keeps a lighted lamp under a pot. Instead it is put on a stand where it will light up the house. In the same way, people must see your light. When they see the good things you do, they will praise God your Father."

Do not be angry

Matthew 5.21-26

"The Law tells you, 'Do not kill anyone. If you do, you will be put to death.' But now I tell you: Even if you are angry with your brother, you will be in danger of being taken to court. If you call him "Useless," you will be in danger of being taken to the Supreme Court. If you call him "You fool!" you will be in danger of going to the fire of hell.

"Perhaps you are bringing an offering to God. Suddenly at the altar you remember there is some trouble between your brother and you. Leave your gift there in front of the altar. Go back at once and make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift to God.



"Someone may want to take you to court. Try to settle the matter outside the court. Once you are in the court, he will bring you before the judge. The judge will send you to the police. They will put you in jail. You will have to stay there until the punishment is over."

Do not fight back

Matthew 5.38-42

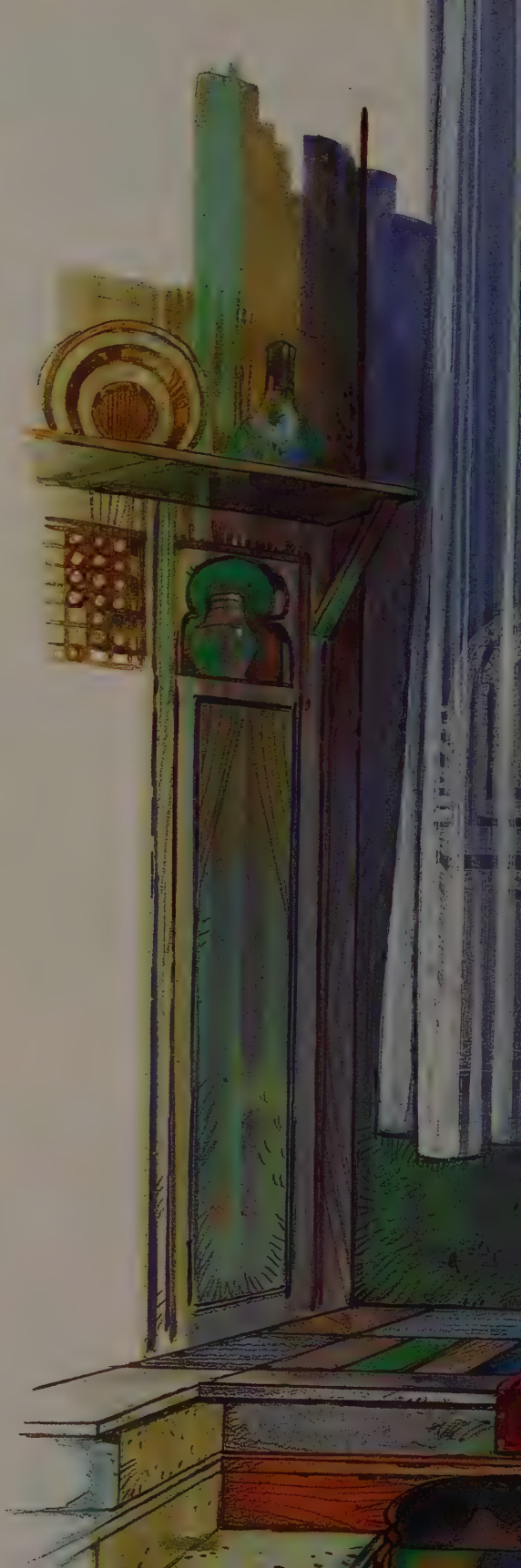
"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was a well-known saying. Many old laws were based on this. If a man hurt another, the punishment should be equal to the hurt he caused.

"The Law of Moses tells you, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But now I tell you: Do not fight back anyone who hurts you. If anyone hits you on the right cheek, let him hit your left cheek too. If someone wants to take your shirt by force, let him take your coat also. If a Roman soldier forces you to carry his luggage one kilometer, carry it for two. Give to anyone who asks for help. Do not turn away from anyone who wants to borrow."

Love your enemies

Matthew 5.43-48

"The Law tells you, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies.' But now I tell you: Love your enemies. Pray for those who trouble you. Then you will be the true children of God your Father. For he makes his sun shine and the rain fall both on bad and good people. Why should God bless you if you love only those who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! If you are nice only to your friends, what is so special about it? Even people who do not know God do that! You should be as perfect as God your Father."



Give to others

Matthew 6.1-4

"Do not show off your good deeds. If you do that, God will not bless you.

"When you help someone in need, do not make a big show of it. The show-offs want others to praise them. I tell you, that is the only reward they will get. When you help a needy person, even your closest friend should not know about it. Only then will God your Father bless you for what you do so quietly."

Pray like this

Matthew 6.5-15

"Do not make a show of your prayer. Show-offs love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and at the street-corners. They want everyone to see them. I tell you, that is the only reward they will get. When you pray, do not let everybody see you. God your Father, who sees what you are doing, will reward you.

"Do not pray with a lot of useless words. Only those who do not know God do that. They think their gods will hear their long prayers. Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him. Pray like this:

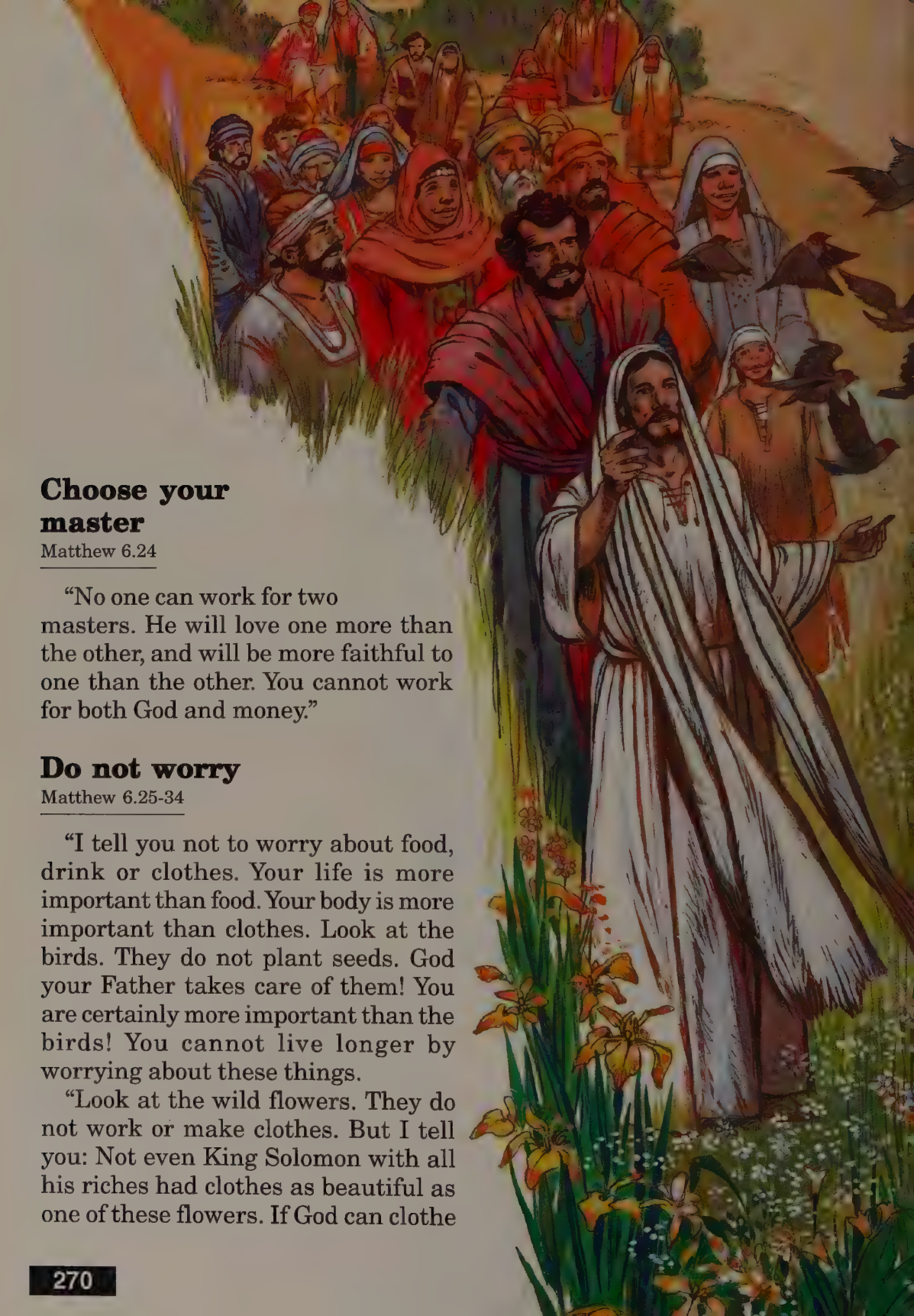
'Our Father in heaven,
May everyone honour your holy name.
May everyone accept your ways.
May they obey you here, as you are obeyed in heaven.
Give us today the food we need.
Forgive us the wrongs we have done.
We too forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.
Do not let us go wrong,
and keep us safe from the Evil One.'

"If you forgive those who do wrong to you, God your Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you."

Trust in God

Matthew 6.19-21

"Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth. Moths and rust can spoil them. Robbers can break in and steal them. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven. Moths, rust or robbers cannot spoil them there. Remember, your heart will always be where your riches are."



Choose your master

Matthew 6.24

"No one can work for two masters. He will love one more than the other, and will be more faithful to one than the other. You cannot work for both God and money."

Do not worry

Matthew 6.25-34

"I tell you not to worry about food, drink or clothes. Your life is more important than food. Your body is more important than clothes. Look at the birds. They do not plant seeds. God your Father takes care of them! You are certainly more important than the birds! You cannot live longer by worrying about these things.

"Look at the wild flowers. They do not work or make clothes. But I tell you: Not even King Solomon with all his riches had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. If God can clothe

the wild grass that lives only for a short time, surely he will clothe you. You must have more trust in God! "Stop worrying about food or clothes. Only people who do not know God worry about these things. God your Father knows that you need them. Instead, do the things that God wants. Then he will give you everything you need. So do not worry about tomorrow. Each day brings its own troubles. Don't add to the troubles of each day by worrying."

Do not find fault

Matthew 7.1-5

"Do not find fault with others. Then God will not find fault with you. Remember, God will use the same rules for you as you use for others. Why bother about the dust in your brother's eye when you have a log in your own eye? First take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the dust out of his eye!"

Ask, seek, knock

Matthew 7.7-12

"Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Are you a father? If your son asks for bread, will you give him a stone? Or would you give him a snake when he asks for fish? No! Even a bad father knows how to give good things to his children. Surely, then, God your Father will give good things to those who ask him!

"Do for others what you want them to do for you. This is what the Law of Moses and the prophets teach us."

Choose the right way

Matthew 7.13-14

"Go into life through the narrow gate. The wide gate and easy road lead to hell. Many people are on this road.

But the narrow gate and the hard road lead to real life. Very few people find that road!"

Be careful

Matthew 7.15-20

"Be careful of people who speak lies in God's name. They look as gentle as sheep, but they are really like wolves. You will know them by what they do. Thorny bushes cannot give grapes or figs. A good tree cannot give bad fruit. A sick tree cannot give good fruit. A tree that gives bad fruit is cut down and burnt. So you will know the people who speak lies in God's name by what they do."

Obey my teachings

Matthew 7.21-29

"Many people may call me 'Lord, Lord', but all of them will not enter God's new world. Only those who obey God will enter God's new world. On the Judgment Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God's message. We drove out many demons, and did many miracles!' Then I will say to them, 'Go away, you wicked people! I never knew you!' "

"Anyone who obeys my teachings is like this wise man. He built his house on rock. The rain poured down. The rivers flooded. The wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock.

"But anyone who does not obey my teachings is like this foolish man. He built his house on sand. The rain poured down. The rivers flooded. The wind blew hard against that house, and it fell with a terrible crash!"

Jesus finished saying these things. The crowd was amazed at the way he taught. He was not like the religious teachers of the Jews. He taught with the authority of God.

PEOPLE WHO THOUGHT THEY WERE RIGHT

The Sadducees

Matthew 22.23-33

The Sadducees were a small religious party among the Jews. They were not very strict about religious rules and customs. They did not accept all that the Scriptures taught. They used a silly story to support their ideas.

Some Sadducees came to Jesus. They believed that people would not live again after death. "Master," they said, "Moses taught that if a man dies without children, his brother must marry the widow. Their children would be known as the dead man's children. Once there lived seven brothers. The oldest got married and died without children. His younger brother married his widow. But he too died without children. The same thing happened to all the other brothers.

Last of all, the woman died. On the day when the dead live again, whose wife will she be? All of them had married her!"

Jesus answered, "How wrong you are! It is because you don't know God's Holy Book or his power. When the dead live again, they will be like the angels in heaven. They will not marry at all. You should know about the dead rising to life. God said in his Holy Book: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' That means he is the God of the living, not of the dead."

When the crowds heard this, they were amazed at his teaching.

The Pharisees

Matthew 23.1-7

The Pharisees were another religious group among the Jews. They were larger in number. They were very strict about religious rules and customs. One of their customs was to have long coloured threads (tassels) attached to their robes. They also carried Scripture verses tied to the body.

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, "The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees teach you from the Law of Moses. So you must obey what they teach. But don't follow their ways. They say one thing and do another. They make very difficult rules for people. Yet they won't give them even a little help. They are only show-offs! See the large Scripture-straps they tie on their foreheads and arms! Look at the long tassels of their robes! They look for special seats at feasts and in the places of worship. They want people to honour them in front of others and call them 'Master.' "

Blind guides

Matthew 23.23-26

"You teachers of the Law! You Pharisees! You are going to be in trouble! You are false teachers! You give God one-tenth even of your garden herbs. But you do not obey the really important things of God's Law. You should do all the things the Law teaches. You should be fair, kind and honest. You are blind guides! You point out small mistakes of the people. Yet you do very wicked things!

"You wash the outside of your cups and plates. But you are so evil and selfish inside. You blind Pharisees! Clean your inside first. Then your outside will be clean too!"

Nicodemus

John 3.1-17

Nicodemus was different from most of the religious leaders. He wanted to learn from Jesus.

A Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus one night. He was a Pharisee. Nicodemus said to Jesus, "Master, we know you are a teacher from God. That is why you can do such miracles."

Jesus answered, "No one can enter God's new world unless he is born again."

"How can a grown-up man be born again?" Nicodemus asked. "He certainly cannot be born through his mother a second time!"

"I tell you," replied Jesus. "No one can enter God's new world unless he is cleansed and born anew by God's Spirit. A person is born into this world through his parents. But he must be born of God's Spirit to be God's child. Do not be surprised that I say you must all be born again. The wind blows so freely. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. Anyone who is born of God's Spirit will also be like that."

"How can this be?" asked Nicodemus.

Jesus answered, "You, a teacher of God's people, don't know this? I tell you the truth. I am talking about what I know and have seen. But no one wants to believe what I say. You don't believe what I speak about things of this world. Then how will you ever believe what I speak about God? No one has ever been with God except the One who became man. He has come down from God and can speak about God."

Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert. In the same way the One who became man will be lifted up. Then everyone who believes in him will have true and everlasting life. God loved the people so much that he sent his only Son. Any one who believes in him will not die, but will have true and everlasting life. God sent his Son into the world not to punish it, but to save it.

PEOPLE MADE RIGHT BY GOD

Jesus and the Samaritan woman

John 4.1-26

The Jews looked down on the Samaritans as low-caste people (outcasts). They would even avoid going through Samaria. They thought men were more important than women. A religious teacher would not talk to a woman in public. But Jesus was quite different from other Jewish teachers.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus had more followers than John. He had baptized more people. When Jesus heard what people were saying, he left Judea and went back to Galilee. On the way he had to go through the district of Samaria.

There he came to a town called Sychar. It was near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus was very tired. He sat down by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.) The woman answered, "You are a Jew. I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews would not use the vessels that Samaritans used.)

Jesus answered, "If you knew who I am, then you would ask me, and I would give you life-giving water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you don't have a bucket. The well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? Our ancestor Jacob gave us this well. He, his sons and his flocks all drank from it. Do you mean you are greater than Jacob?"

Jesus answered, "Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I give him will rise like a river, giving him true and everlasting life."

"Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again. I won't have to come here every time to take water."

"Go back and bring your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," she answered.

Jesus replied, "You are right! You were married five times. The man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth."

"I see you are a man of God," the woman said. "My Samaritan ancestors worshipped God on this mountain. But you Jews say Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God."

Jesus said to her, "Listen to me. A time will come when people will not worship God the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship. But we Jews know whom we worship. God had promised the Saviour to the Jews. But right now God is giving people power to worship the Father the way he wants. Because God is Spirit, people must truly worship him in the spiritual way."

The woman said to him, "I know that the Saviour is coming soon. He will tell us everything."

Jesus answered, "I am the Saviour. The Saviour is speaking to you."

Jesus and the sinful woman

John 8.2-11

The Rabbis used to judge very harshly those who broke the Law of Moses. In this story the religious leaders wanted to test Jesus. If he ordered punishment, they could say he was not following what he taught about God's love. If he did not do so, they could say he did not respect the Law.

Early one morning Jesus went to the Temple. People gathered around him. He sat down and began to teach them. The religious teachers and the Pharisees brought in a sinful woman. She had been caught doing something shameful. They made her stand before the crowd. "Master," they said to Jesus, "we caught her just as she was doing the shameful thing. The Law of Moses teaches us to stone such a woman to death. Now, what do you say?" They said this to find fault with Jesus. They hoped he would say something wrong. But Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger.

At last he looked up at them and said, "Is there anyone here who has never sinned? Then he can throw the first stone at her." He bent down again and wrote on the ground. When they heard this, they went away one by one. The woman still stood there in front of Jesus. Jesus looked up and asked her, "Where are they? Is there no one left to punish you?" "No one, sir," she answered. "Well, then," Jesus said, "I too won't punish you. Go, but don't sin again!"

WHAT IS RIGHT BEFORE GOD

What makes a person unclean

Mark 7.14-23

The Pharisees were very strict about certain customs. They had rules about how to wash their hands and vessels. They hated anyone who did not follow these rules. But they were never bothered about how unclean their heart was!

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "All of you, listen and understand what I say. Nothing that goes into a person can make him unclean. It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean."

When they were at home with Jesus, his disciples asked him to explain what he meant. "You are as dull as the others," Jesus said to them. "Don't you understand? Nothing you eat can really make you unclean. It does not go into the heart. It goes into the stomach and later goes out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus meant that all food is good.)

He went on to say, "It is what comes out of you that makes you unclean. Your bad thoughts come from inside the heart. So people steal, cheat, kill and lie. They spread stories about others. They show off and act silly. They want things that belong to others. They are indecent and immoral. All such people are bad inside. They are the unclean ones."

Is it right to pay taxes?

Mark 12.13-17

The Jews believed that their country belonged to God. So they did not think they should pay taxes to their Roman rulers. They thought the Messiah they were waiting for would never ask them to pay taxes.

The Romans punished severely those who did not pay their taxes. The enemies of Jesus were always looking for a chance to make Jesus say something against Rome or the Jews. The Pharisees even sided with the supporters of a political party to trap Jesus. If Jesus approved paying taxes to Rome, they could say he was against the Jews. If he did not do so, they could say he was against Rome.

Some Pharisees and some other men of Herod's party came to Jesus. They tried to trap him with questions. They said, "Master, we know you always tell the truth. You don't worry about what people think. You don't care if a man is important or not. You teach people what God really wants them to know. Tell us, is it right for us to pay taxes to the Roman rulers?"

Jesus knew they were not honest. So he answered, "Why are you trying to trap me? Bring me a silver coin."

They brought him a coin, and he asked, "Whose face and name are these?"

"King Caesar's," they answered.

So Jesus said, "Well, then, pay King Caesar what he should get. Pay God what God should get!" They were amazed at Jesus' reply.

What is right for the Sabbath day

Luke 13.10-17

People at the time of Jesus thought that only bad people got ill. The Jewish Law was very strict. It allowed only certain things to be done on the Sabbath day.

One Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman there had a demon. This had made her sick for 18 years. She was bent over and could not stand straight at all. Jesus saw her and called out to her. "Your trouble is gone!" he told her. Then he put his hands on her. At once she stood up straight and praised God.

The synagogue leader was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. So he told the people, "There are six days in which we should work. Come on those days and be healed. But don't come for healing on the Sabbath!" The Lord answered him, "You false teachers! Don't you take your ox or donkey from its shed and give it water on the Sabbath? This sick woman is one of God's people. Satan had troubled her for 18 years. Can't I set her free on the Sabbath?" At Jesus' words his enemies felt very bad. But the people were very happy with all the miracles that he did.

The road to the cross

GREAT SURPRISES

Peter realises who Jesus is

Mark 8.27-30

Lots of people wondered who Jesus really was. Jesus wanted his disciples to think about who he was.

Jesus and his disciples were coming to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Tell me, who do people say I am?" "Some say you are John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say you are Elijah. Some others say you are one of the prophets." "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Saviour!" Then Jesus ordered them, "Do not tell anyone about me."

Jesus will suffer and die

Mark 8.31-38

Crowds of people had followed Jesus. His closest disciples believed that he was the Saviour they had waited for. But they could not understand many of the things he did. Everyone thought he would end the Roman rule and set Israel free. So when Jesus said that he would be taken and killed, the disciples were surprised.

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples, "The One who became man must suffer much. He will be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the religious teachers will turn against him and have him killed. But on the third day he will live again." He made this very clear to them.

So Peter took Jesus aside and scolded him. He did not want Jesus to suffer and die.

Then Jesus turned around and scolded Peter, "Get away from me, Satan," he said. "You think like men, not like God!"

Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. "If anyone wants to come with me," he told them, "he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me. If anyone wants to keep his life safe, he will lose it. If anyone loses his life for me and for God's Good News, he will save it. Does a person gain anything if he gets the whole world, but loses his life? Never! There is nothing he can give to get back his life. If you are ashamed of me and do not give my Good News to the sinful people, I will be ashamed of you when I come again. I will come with my Father's angels in God's full authority."

His dazzling glory

Mark 9.2-10

After a week Jesus went up a high mountain with Peter, James, and John. There was no one else with them. A change came over Jesus as they looked at him. His clothes became dazzling white. They also saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Master, how good that we three are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter did not know what to say because he and the others were so afraid.

Then a cloud came and covered them. A voice from the cloud said, "This is my own dear Son. Listen to him!" The disciples looked around, but saw only Jesus with them.

As they came down the mountain, Jesus said to them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen. Wait until I, the One who became man, have risen from death."

They obeyed him, but they asked one another, "What does 'rising from death' mean"?

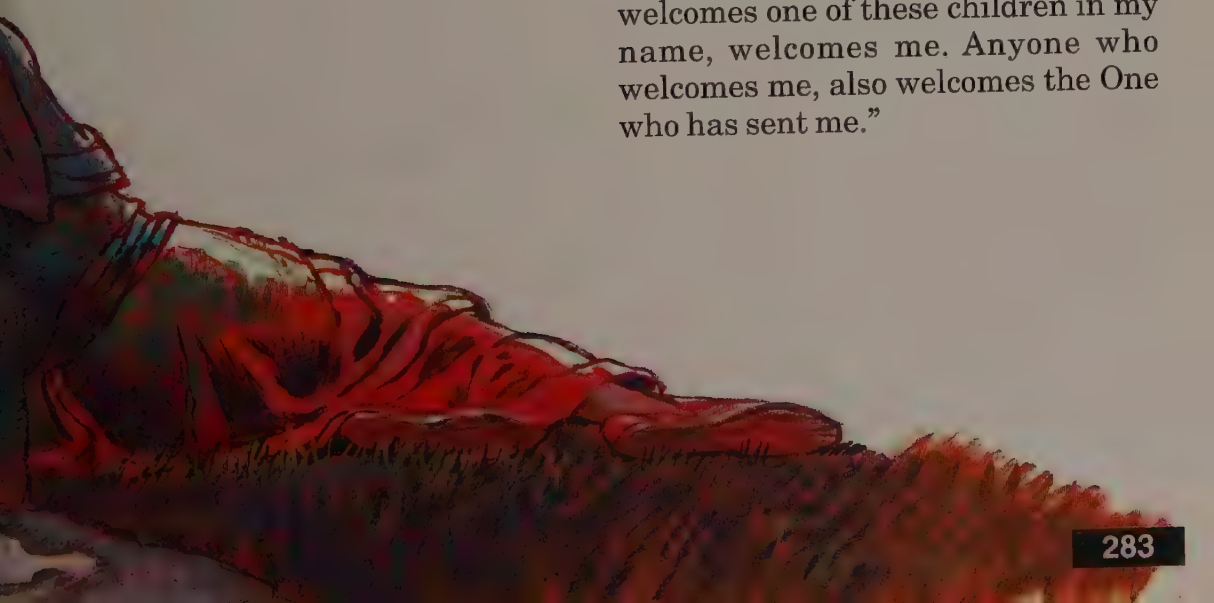
GREATNESS AND HUMILITY

Who is the greatest?

Mark 9.33-37

When they came home to Capernaum, Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you talking about on the road?"

They kept quiet. They had been arguing about who was the greatest among them. Jesus sat down, called them, and said, "He who wants to be first must be last and be the servant of all." Then he made a child stand in front of them. Putting his arms around the child he said, "Anyone who welcomes one of these children in my name, welcomes me. Anyone who welcomes me, also welcomes the One who has sent me."



Who is on our side

Mark 9.38-41

John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw a man driving out demons using your name. But we told him to stop, because he is not one of us."

"Don't do that," Jesus told him, "because no one who does miracles in my name will quickly turn against me. He who is not against us is for us. I tell you, God will bless anyone who gives you a drink of water because you are my followers."

Who can receive God's blessing

Mark 10.13-16

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to bless them. But the disciples turned the people away. When Jesus saw this, he was upset and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me. Do not stop them, because they can accept God's ways. I tell you, those who do not accept God's ways like a child, do not belong to God." Then holding the children close to himself, he put his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

"Are you ready to suffer?"

Mark 10.35-45

James and John came to Jesus. "Master," they said, "would you do us a favour?"

"What is it?" Jesus asked them.

They answered, "One day you will sit as the Great King on your throne. Then let one of us sit at your right side and the other at your left side."

Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Are you ready to suffer as I must suffer?"

"We are," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Yes, you will indeed suffer as I must suffer. But I cannot choose a place for anyone. God will choose and give the places of honour."

The other ten disciples heard about it and became angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said, "You know that the rulers and leaders of the world control the people. But it must be different among you. If you want to be great, you must serve others. For even I, the One who became man, did not come to be served. I came to give my life to save people."

DEATH IS NOT THE END

The threat of death

Luke 13.31-35

Some Pharisees came to Jesus and told him, "You must get away from here. King Herod wants to kill you."

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell that murderer that I will be here only for a little while. I will soon finish my work of driving out demons and healing. Like the prophets of old, I will be killed in Jerusalem while doing my work.

"O Jerusalem! You murder the prophets. You stone to death God's messengers. How I wanted to comfort you! I wanted to put my arms around

you, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings! But you wouldn't let me! So your Temple will be destroyed. I tell you, you will not see me until you accept me as the Saviour sent by God."

The death of Lazarus

John 11.1-16

Lazarus of Bethany fell sick. He was the brother of Mary and Martha. The sisters sent Jesus a message, "Master, your dear friend is sick."

When Jesus heard it, he said, "This sickness will bring honour to God the Father and his Son. Lazarus will not die."

Jesus loved Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on for two more days. Then he said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

"Master," the disciples answered, "the other day the people there wanted to stone you. Are you going back there?"

Jesus said, "He who walks in daylight does not fall, because he has light. But if he walks during the night he falls, because he has no light." Then Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep. I will go and wake him up."

The disciples answered, "Master, if he is asleep, he will get well."

Jesus meant Lazarus had died, but they understood he was just sleeping. So Jesus told them clearly, "Lazarus is dead! But I am glad I was not there, so that you will believe. Let us go to him."

Thomas said to the others, "Let us go and die with our Master!"

Jesus promises life

John 11.17-27

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been buried four days. Bethany was less than three kilometres from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Master, if you had been here, my brother would not have died! But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

"Your brother will live again," Jesus told her.

"I know," she replied, "that he will come back to life on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the One who gives life to the dead. Anyone who believes in me will live even if he dies. Anyone who believes and puts his trust in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Master!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Saviour we have been waiting for. You are the Son of God!"

Jesus weeps!

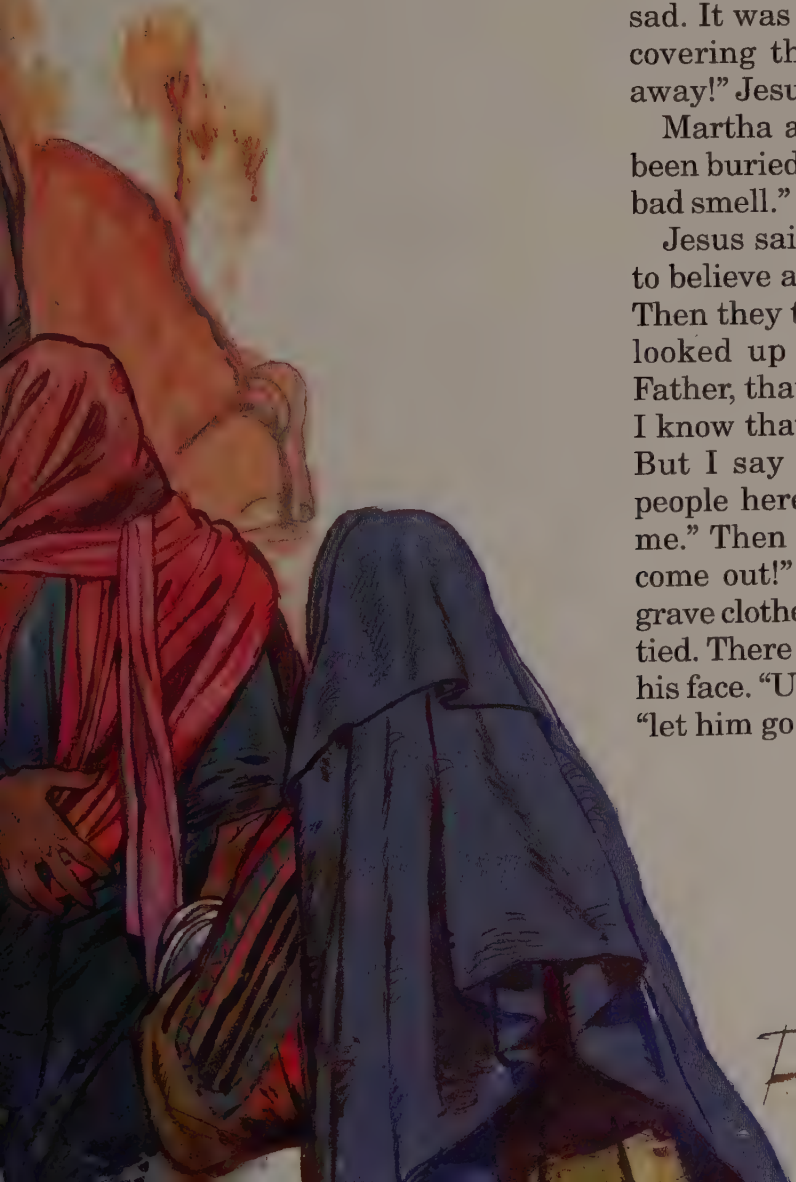
John 11.28-37

Then Martha went back and spoke to her sister Mary quietly. "The Master is here! He wants to see you." Mary hurried out to meet him. Jesus was still outside the village where Martha had met him. The visitors

followed Mary thinking she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary came to Jesus and fell at his feet. "Master," she said, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died!"

When Jesus saw Mary and the others weeping, he became very sad. "Where have you buried him?" he asked them.



"Come and see, Master," they answered.

Jesus wept. "See how much he loved him!" the people said.

But some said, "He made the blind man see. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus alive?"

"Lazarus, come out!"

John 11.38-44

Jesus went to the tomb feeling very sad. It was a cave with a large stone covering the front. "Take the stone away!" Jesus said.

Martha answered, "Master, he has been buried four days! There will be a bad smell."

Jesus said to her, "Didn't I ask you to believe and see how great God is?" Then they took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "I thank you, Father, that you have listened to me. I know that you always listen to me. But I say this because I want the people here to believe that you sent me." Then he said loudly, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus came out in his grave clothes. His hands and feet were tied. There was a piece of cloth around his face. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "let him go!"

The plan to kill Jesus

John 11.45-54

Many who visited Mary saw this miracle, and believed in Jesus. But some of them went to the Pharisees, and told them everything. So the Pharisees and the chief priests met with the Jewish Council. They said, "What shall we do? Look at all the miracles this man is doing! If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and destroy our people and our Temple!"

Caiaphas, who was the High Priest that year, said, "What fools you are! You don't understand. Isn't it better that one man be destroyed instead of the whole nation?" As High Priest he spoke God's truth that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish people! In fact his death would unite all God's people everywhere.

From that day, the Jewish leaders made plans to kill Jesus. So Jesus went secretly to a place near the desert and stayed with his disciples.

THE FINAL JOURNEY

Jesus speaks about his death again

Luke 18.31-34

Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "Listen! We are going to Jerusalem. Everything the prophets wrote about the One who became man will come true. Our people will hand him over to the Romans. They will make fun of him, treat him badly, and spit on him. They will whip him and kill him. But on the third day he will come to life."

But the disciples did not understand this. The meaning of what Jesus said was hidden from them.

The welcome in Jerusalem

Mark 11.1-11

Kings and army generals led processions to celebrate their victory in battle. They wanted to show the people their authority.

500 years ago, the prophet Zechariah had told the Jews about the Saviour who would come from God. He would come to them riding on a donkey, which is a symbol of peace. Jesus did not want the people to think that he was going to set up an earthly kingdom.

Jesus and his disciples were close to Jerusalem. They were near the towns of Bethphage and Bethany at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent out two of of them saying, "Go to that village over there. As soon as you get there, you will find a young donkey tied up. No one has ever used it for riding. Untie it and bring it here. If someone asks you why, tell him that the Master needs it and will send it back soon."

So they went and found a young donkey out in the street. It was tied to the door of a house. As they were untying it, some of those who stood there asked, "What are you doing?"

They answered just as Jesus had told them, and the men let them go. They brought the donkey to Jesus, put

their clothes on it, and Jesus got on. Many people spread their clothes on the road. Others spread branches from the trees. The people began to shout, "Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the coming of our own ruler in the family of King David! Praise be to God!"

Jesus entered Jerusalem, went into the Temple, and looked around at everything. But as it was late in the day, he went to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

Jesus upset by misuse of the Temple

Mark 11.15-19

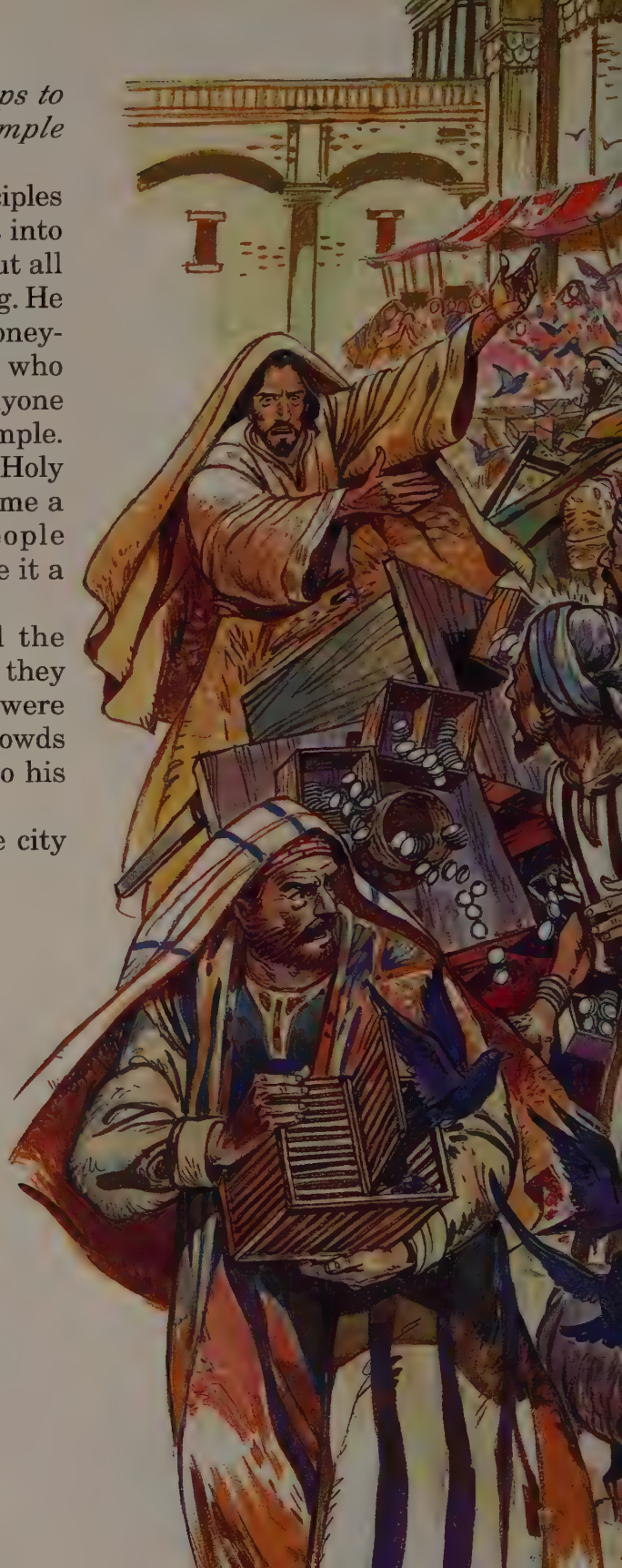
Around the Temple there were a number of courtyards. Non-Jews were not allowed to enter there. An outer courtyard was used for worshippers other than the Jews. A number of shops were set up in these courtyards for the Jews to buy animals for sacrifices. Roman money was not allowed in the Temple. So

money-changers also set up shops to exchange it for the special Temple money.

The next day Jesus and the disciples returned to Jerusalem. He went into the Temple and began to drive out all those who were buying and selling. He turned over the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He would not let anyone carry anything through the Temple. He then taught the people, "The Holy Book says, 'My Temple will become a house of prayer for all people everywhere.' But you have made it a hideout for thieves!"

When the chief priests and the religious teachers heard of this, they wanted to kill Jesus. But they were afraid to do anything, because crowds of people were there listening to his teaching.

In the evening, Jesus left the city with his disciples.



Jesus is questioned

Mark 11.27-33

Again they returned to Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, the religious teachers, and the elders came and asked him, "What right have you to do these things? Who gave you this right?"

Jesus answered them, "I will ask you just one question. If you give me an answer, I will tell you what right I have to do these things. Tell me, who gave John the right to baptize: God or man?"

They talked to each other: "What shall we say? If we answer, 'God,' he will say, 'Why, then, did you not believe John?' But they did not want to say 'Man', for the people believed that John spoke for God. So their answer to Jesus was, "We don't know."

Jesus said to them, "Then I will not tell you by what right I do these things."

The widow's offering

Mark 12.41-44

Jesus was sitting in the Temple near the place for the offerings. He watched the people as they offered money in the box. Many rich people put in a lot of money. Then a poor widow came and put in two little copper coins. He called his disciples together and said, "I tell you: This poor widow's offering is worth more than all the other offerings. The others put in a little out of their riches. But this poor woman put in everything she had to live on!"

The Temple will be destroyed

Mark 13.1-2

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of his disciples said, "Look, Master! What wonderful stones and buildings!" Jesus answered, "Yes, they are wonderful. But very soon all these will be destroyed. Not a single stone here will be left in its place!"

How Jesus died

THE ENEMIES OF JESUS

The plan to arrest Jesus

Matthew 26.1-5

Crowds of people had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Festival. Many of them had seen Jesus at work in other parts of the country. So they gave Jesus a hero's welcome to the city.

When Jesus had finished teaching, he said to his disciples, "In two days, it will be the Passover Festival. The One who became man will soon be killed by his own people."

The chief priests and elders gathered in the palace of the High Priest. They planned to arrest Jesus secretly and put him to death. "We must not do it during the festival," they said, "or the people will rise against us."

Judas turns against Jesus

Mark 14.10-11

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, met the chief priests. He promised to help them arrest Jesus. They agreed to pay him some money. So Judas started looking for his chance to hand Jesus over to his enemies.

THE LAST SUPPER

The upstairs room

Mark 14.12-16

It was the day before the Passover. The lambs for the festival were to be killed on that day. The disciples of Jesus asked him, "Where do you want us to prepare the feast?"

Jesus sent two of them to the city saying, "A man carrying a pot of water will meet you. Follow him to the house which he will enter. Ask the owner of the house, 'Where is the room which the Master wants for the feast with his disciples?' Then he will show you a large upstairs room, all clean and

ready. There you may prepare the meal for us."

The disciples found everything just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover meal.

Jesus washes the feet of his disciples

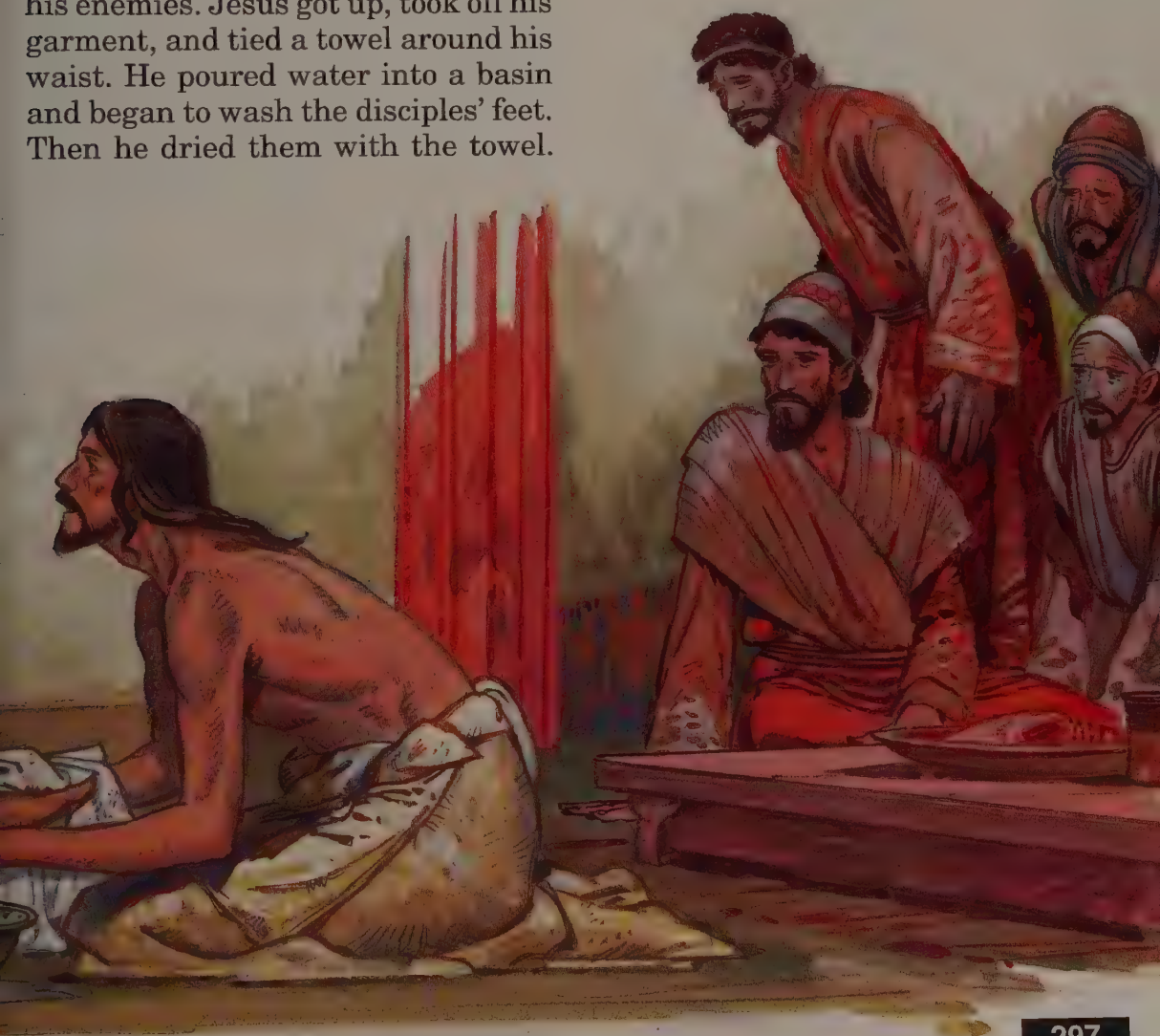
John 13.2,4-17

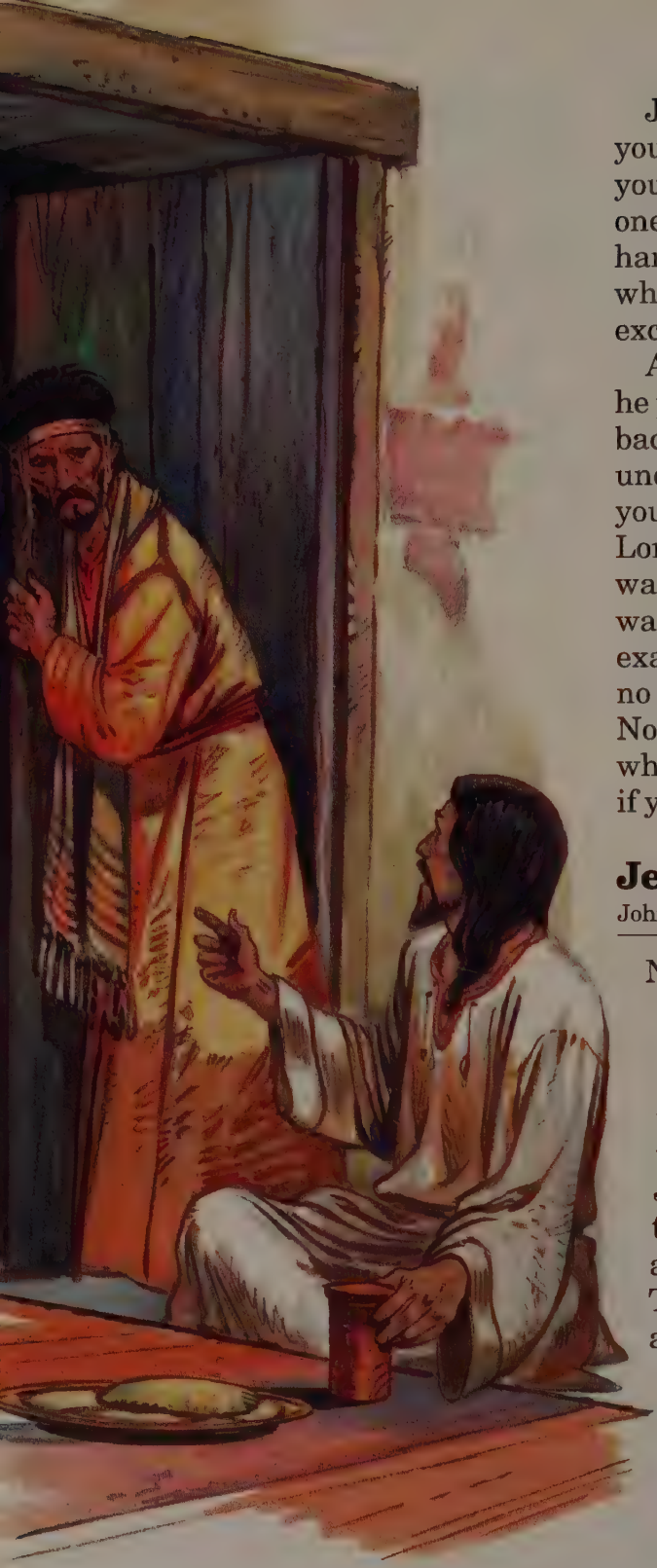
Jesus and his disciples were at supper. The Devil had already told Judas Iscariot to hand Jesus over to his enemies. Jesus got up, took off his garment, and tied a towel around his waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet. Then he dried them with the towel. But Simon Peter asked him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered, "Now you don't understand what I am doing. But you will understand it later." Peter said, "Never will I allow you to wash my feet!"

"If I don't wash your feet," Jesus answered, "you can't be my disciple."

Peter answered, "Master, then please wash not only my feet, but my hands and head as well!"





Jesus said, "You have already had your bath. So you only need to wash your feet. All of you are clean, except one!" Jesus knew who was going to hand him over to the enemies. That is why he said, "All of you are clean, except one."

After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his garment on again and went back to his place. He asked, "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" "You rightly call me Master and Lord. I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet. So you should also wash one another's feet. I have set an example for you to follow. I tell you, no servant is greater than his master. No messenger is greater than the one who sent him. How happy you will be if you follow this truth!"

Jesus warns Judas

John 13.21-30

Now Jesus was very troubled and said to his disciples, "One of you will hand me over to my enemies!" The disciples looked at one another, wondering whom he meant. One of the disciples was sitting next to Jesus. Peter made a sign and said to him, "Ask him whom he is talking about."

That disciple moved closer to Jesus and asked, "Who is it, Master?"

Jesus answered, "I will dip some bread in the sauce and give it to the man." Then he took a piece

of bread, dipped it, and gave it to Judas Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, the Devil took control of him. Jesus said to him, "Be quick about what you are going to do!" The others did not understand this. Some thought that Jesus wanted him to buy something for the feast or give money to the poor. For Judas kept their money.

After taking the bread, Judas went out at once. It was night.

Jesus is the way to the Father

John 14.1-14

"Do not be worried and upset," Jesus told them. "Believe in God and in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. I am going to make a place ready for you. I will come back and take you to be with me. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Master, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus answered him, "I am the true way. I am the true life. I am the only way to the Father." Then he said to them all, "Now that you know who I am, you will also know my Father. You know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father. That is all we need."

Jesus answered, "I have been with you all for so long. Don't you know me yet, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. Then how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Philip, don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I have spoken to you is from my Father. The Father, who is in me, does his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. I tell you, he who believes in me will do more than what I do. This is possible because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name. Then the Father's power will be shown through me. If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it."

The promise of the Holy Spirit

John 14.15-31

"If you love me, you will obey my teaching. I will ask the Father to send you another Helper. He will send you the Holy Spirit, who will be with you always. He will show you the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you will know him, because he will stay within you.

"When I go, you will not be left all alone. I will come back to you. In a little while the world will not see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father. You will also know that you are in me, just as I am in you.

"He who obeys my teaching loves me truly. My Father will love him. I too will love him and show myself to him."

Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "Master, how is it that you will show yourself to us and not to the world?"

Jesus answered him, "He who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him. We will come to him and live with him. He who does not love me does not obey my teaching. The teaching you have heard from me is from the Father, who sent me.

"I have told you this while I am still with you. Later the Father will send you the Holy Spirit, the Helper, in my place. He will teach you and make you remember everything.

"Peace I leave with you. My own peace I give you. The world cannot give you that. Do not be worried, upset or afraid. I have told you, I am leaving, but I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for he is greater than I. I have told you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe. I cannot talk with you much longer, because the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, but the world must know that I love the Father. That is why I do everything as he tells me."

The Lord's Supper

Mark 14.22-26

The last meal that Jesus had with his followers is known as the "Last Supper" All over the world Christians still take bread and wine in the same way as Jesus told them to do. This is done to remember him. We call this "The Lord's Supper".

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God and broke it. Then he gave it to his disciples and said, "Take it, this is my body."

Then he took a cup and gave thanks to God. He handed it to them. They all drank from it. Jesus said, "This is my blood which is poured out for many. God's agreement with his people is now settled by my blood. I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until I drink the new wine in the world to come."

Then they sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives.

JESUS FORSAKEN BY ALL

He warns his disciples

Mark 14.27-31

Jesus said to his disciples, "All of you will run away and leave me alone. The Holy Book says, 'When God kills the shepherd, the sheep will scatter.' After God brings me back to life, I will go to Galilee to meet you there."

Peter answered, "Even if everyone leaves you, I will never leave you!"

Jesus said to him, "Before the cock crows twice tonight, you will say thrice that you don't know me!"

Now Peter answered even more strongly, "I will never say that, even if I have to die with you!"

All the other disciples said the same thing.

He prays in Gethsemane

Mark 14.32-42

They came to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to his disciples, "Stay here while I pray." He took Peter, James, and John with him. He was very troubled and said to them, "I am almost dying with sorrow. Stay here and keep awake."

He went a little further on, threw himself on the ground, and prayed, "Father, my Father! You are able to do anything. Take this cup of suffering away from me! But do what you want, not what I want."

Then he went back to the three disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn't you keep awake even for one hour?" He said to them, "Keep awake. Pray that the Devil will not make you go wrong. You may want to do the right thing, but you are so weak."

He went away and prayed as before. Again he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. They could not keep their eyes open. They did not know what to say to him.

When he came back the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The time has come! The One who became man will now be handed over to sinful men. Get up, let us go. Look, here is the man who will do it!"

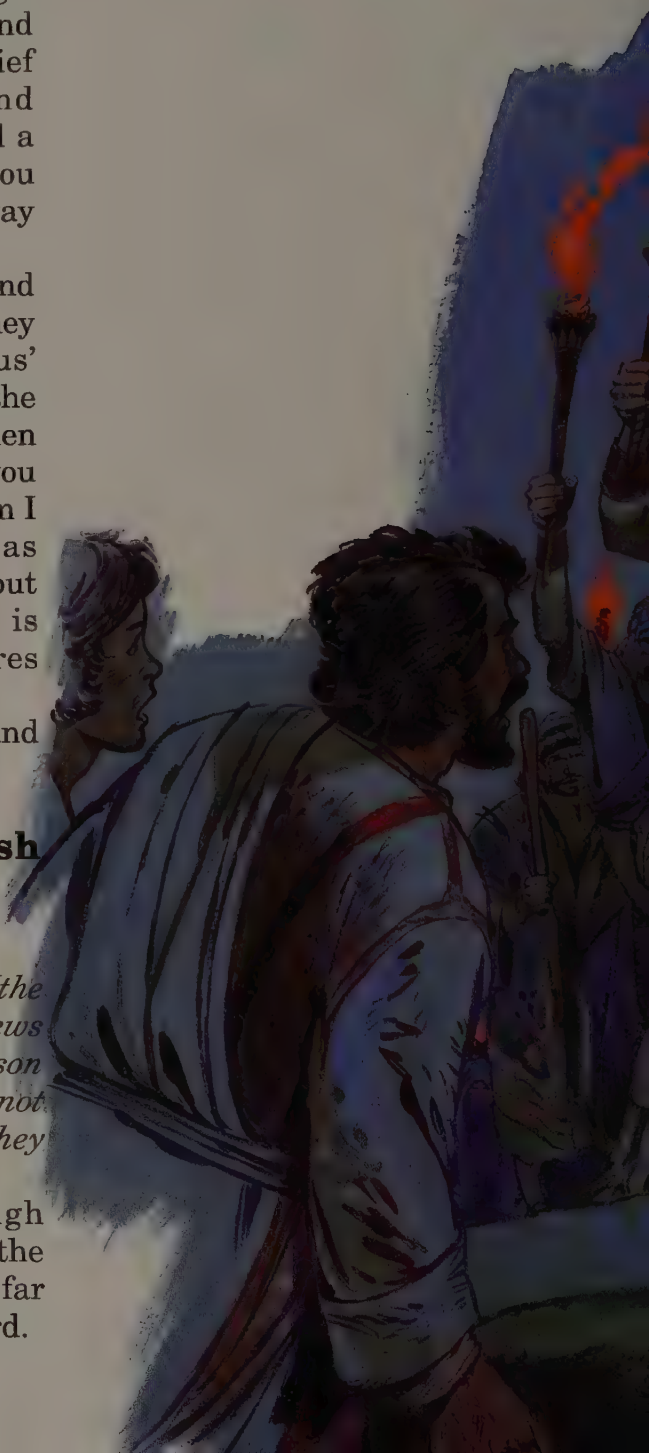
He is arrested

Mark 14.43-50

As Jesus was speaking, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, came leading a crowd. They all carried swords and clubs. They were sent by the chief priests, religious teachers, and elders. Judas had given the crowd a sign, "The man I kiss is the one you want. Arrest him and take him away under guard."

Judas went straight to Jesus and said, "Master!" and kissed him. So they arrested Jesus. But one of Jesus' disciples took his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Then Jesus said to the crowd, "Why did you come with weapons to take me? Am I a thief? Every day I was with you teaching in the Temple, but you did not arrest me. All this is happening because the Scriptures must come true."

Then all the disciples left him and ran away.



Jesus before the Jewish Council

Mark 14.53-65

Jesus often spoke of himself as "the One who became man". To the Jews these words meant a special person sent by God. But most of them did not think that he was from God. They thought he was insulting God.

Jesus was taken to the High Priest's house. All the leaders of the Jews were there. Peter followed far behind and went into the courtyard.

He sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire. The chief priests and the whole Council tried to show that Jesus had done something wrong. They wanted to have him killed. Many men told lies against Jesus, but their stories were not the same. They could not find anything wrong with him.

Then some men got up and told this lie against Jesus, "We heard him say, 'I will pull down this Temple which men have made. In three days I will build one not made by men.'" But they could not prove that he had said anything wrong.

Now the High Priest got up and questioned Jesus, "What do you say to all this?"

But Jesus kept quiet. Again the High Priest questioned him, "Are you the Saviour of the Jews? Are you the Son of God?"

"I am," answered Jesus. "One day you will all see the One who became man sitting at the right side of the

Almighty. You will see him coming in the clouds!"

Now the High Priest tore his clothes in anger and said, "We don't need any more witnesses! You have heard him insulting God! What do you say?"

They all said he was guilty and should be killed.

Some of them began to spit on Jesus. Some covered his eyes and hit him. "Guess who hit you!" they said. Then the guards slapped and beat him.

Peter denies Jesus

Mark 14.66-72

Peter was still warming himself in the courtyard. The High Priest's servant girl came by. When she saw Peter, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."

But he said. "No! I don't know him. I don't understand what you are saying." He went towards the gate. Just then the cock crew.

The servant girl saw him again and said to those nearby, "He is one of them!" But Peter again said, "No!"

A little later those around Peter pointed at him and said, "You can't tell us that you are not one of them. You, too, are from Galilee!"

Then Peter said, "I swear I am telling the truth! May God punish me if I am lying! I do not know the man you are talking about!"

Just then the cock crew again. Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will say thrice that you do not know me." Then he broke down and cried.

Jesus is questioned by Pilate

Matthew 27.1-2, 11-14

The Jewish Council did not have the power to punish anyone by death. Therefore they brought Jesus before the Roman governor. They hoped to please the governor.

Early in the morning the Jewish leaders planned to put Jesus to death. They put him in chains and took him off to the court of Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"So you say," answered Jesus. But he said nothing when the Jewish leaders spoke against him.

So Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear all these things they speak against you?"

Even then Jesus did not speak a word. Pilate was very amazed.

Sentenced to death

Mark 15.6-15

Passover was a Jewish festival. People remembered the day on which they were set free from Egypt.

At every Passover Festival Pilate would set free any prisoner the people asked for. Barabbas was in prison with other rebels who were charged with riot and murder. The crowd gathered and asked Pilate to free a prisoner as usual. He asked them, "Do you want me to set free the King of the Jews?" He knew that the chief priests had brought Jesus before him because they were jealous of him.

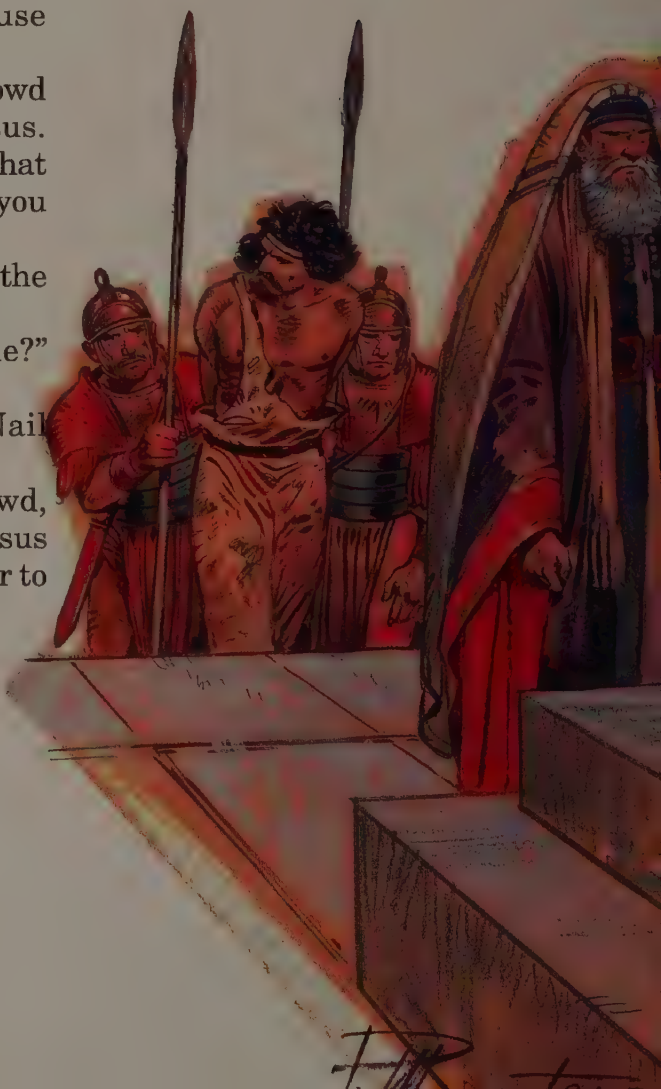
But the chief priests made the crowd ask for Barabbas instead of Jesus. Pilate spoke again to the crowd, "What do you want me to do with the one you call the King of the Jews?"

They shouted back, "Nail him to the cross!"

"But what wrong has he done?" Pilate asked.

They shouted even louder, "Nail him to the cross! Crucify him!"

Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he set Barabbas free. He had Jesus whipped. Then he handed him over to the soldiers to be crucified.



The end of Judas

Matthew 27.3-7

Judas heard that Jesus had been sentenced to death. He was very sorry that he had handed him over to his enemies. He took back the thirty silver coins to the leaders of the Jews. "I have sinned!" he said. "I have caused the death of a sinless man!"

"We don't care!" they answered. "That's your business!"

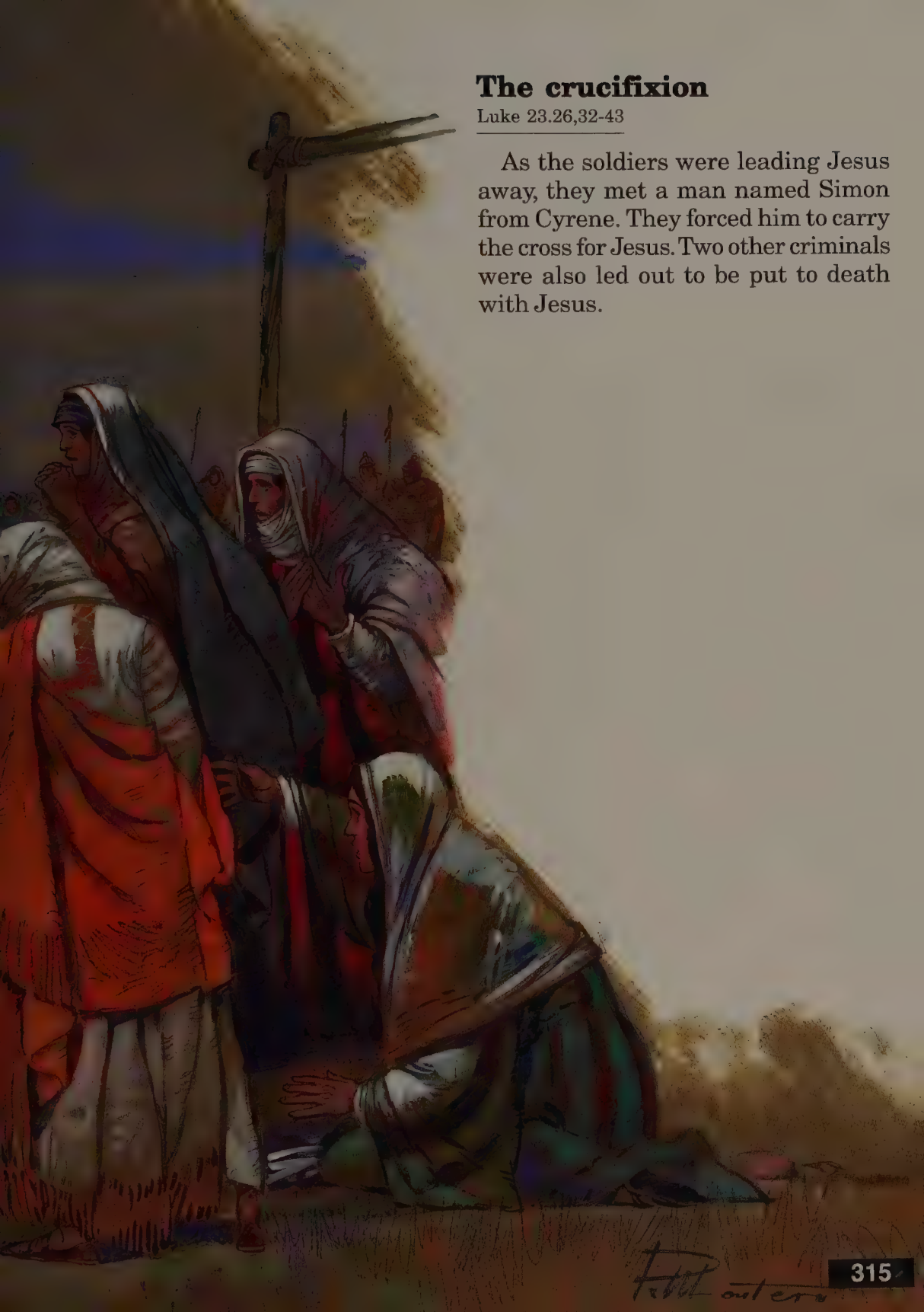
Judas threw the coins into the Temple. Then he went and hanged himself.

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "This money has paid for a man's death. We cannot put it into the money box of the Temple." So they agreed among themselves and bought the "Potter's Field" with that money. This was to be used to bury strangers.

Jesus is mocked

Mark 15.16-20

The soldiers took Jesus to the courtyard of the governor's palace. They called together all the other soldiers. Then they put a purple robe on Jesus. A crown of thorns was made and put on his head. They saluted him saying, "Long live the King of the Jews!" They beat him over the head with a stick and spat on him. Falling on their knees, they bowed before him. When they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to be crucified.



The crucifixion

Luke 23.26,32-43

As the soldiers were leading Jesus away, they met a man named Simon from Cyrene. They forced him to carry the cross for Jesus. Two other criminals were also led out to be put to death with Jesus.

They came to the place called "The Skull". There they crucified Jesus and the two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."

The soldiers divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots. The Jewish leaders made fun of Jesus before the people. They said, "He saved others. Let him now save himself, if he is the Saviour sent by God!"

The soldiers also made fun of him. They brought cheap wine for him to drink. They said, "Save yourself, if you are the King of the Jews!"

The words "The King of the Jews" were written above Jesus.

One of the criminals hanging there spoke rudely to Jesus, "Aren't you the Saviour? Save yourself and us!"

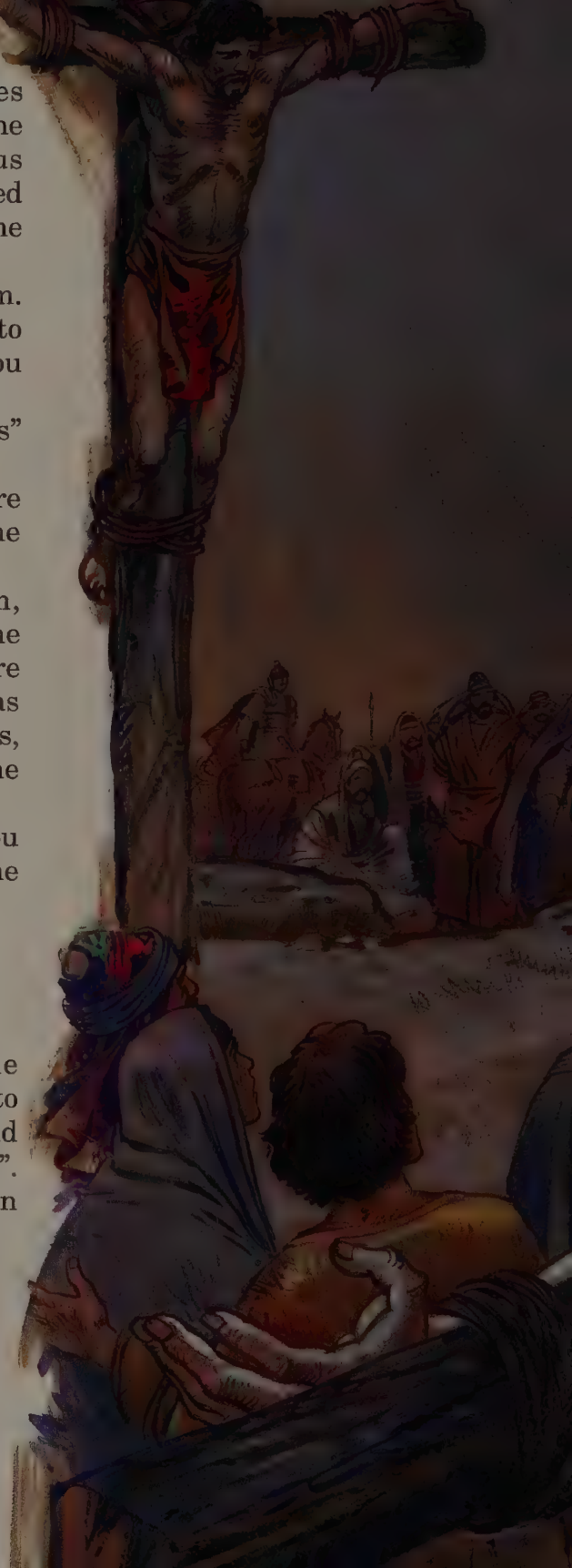
But the other one scolded him, "Don't you fear God? We suffer the same punishment with him. We are getting what we deserve. But he has done no wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come as King!"

Jesus said to him, "I promise you that today you will be happy with me in Paradise."

From the cross

John 19:26-30a

Jesus saw his mother and the beloved disciple standing. He said to his mother,s "He is your son". He said to the disciple, "She is your mother". So the disciple took her into his own home.



·JESUS NAZARENO
·NEONOYC NAZWNOIN

After this, knowing that everything was completed. So the words of the Holy Book now came true. Jesus said, "I am thirsty". They held a branch of hyssop dipped in sour wine to his mouth. When Jesus received it, he said, "It is finished."

Jesus dies

Luke 23.44-49

The whole country was in darkness until three o'clock. The Temple curtain was torn in two. Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Father! In your hands I place my spirit!" Then he died.

The Roman army officer saw what had happened. He praised God, saying, "Surely he was a good man!"

The crowds that had watched what happened returned home in great sorrow. The close friends of Jesus watched from a distance. The women who had followed him from Galilee stood with them.

The burial

Luke 23.50-56

The Jews had their own burial custom. Perfumes were put on the dead body. It would be wrapped in layers of linen cloth with some spices and put in a tomb. The tomb looked like a cave. The opening would be closed with a large round stone.

There was a man named Joseph from Arimathea, a town in Judea. He was a good man. He was waiting for God to begin his rule. He was a member of the Jewish Council. But he had not agreed with what they did to Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He took it down from the cross, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and put it in a tomb. This was a cave in a rock which had never been used. It was Friday. The Sabbath was about to begin.

The women who had followed Jesus from Galilee went with Joseph. They saw the tomb and how the body of Jesus was put in it. Then they went back home and prepared the spices and perfumes for the body. On the Sabbath day they rested as the Law of Moses commanded.

The tomb is guarded

Matthew 27.62-66

On the Sabbath day, the Jewish leaders met Pilate. They said, "Sir, we remember what that liar said when he was alive. He said, 'In three days I will live again.' Give orders for his tomb to be well guarded for the next two days. Let us make sure that his disciples can't steal his body. If they steal it, they will tell the people that he rose from death. This last lie would then be worse than the first one!"

"Take some soldiers," Pilate told them. "Go and make sure that the tomb is fully guarded."

So they went and sealed the tomb and left the soldiers to guard it.

The victory of Jesus

The followers of Jesus were shocked by his death. For hundreds of years the Jewish people had looked for "the One who was to come". The disciples believed they had found this person. They had left home and jobs to follow him.

Now Jesus was dead and everyone knew about it. His followers were very upset. All their hopes were gone! They feared that they also might be killed.

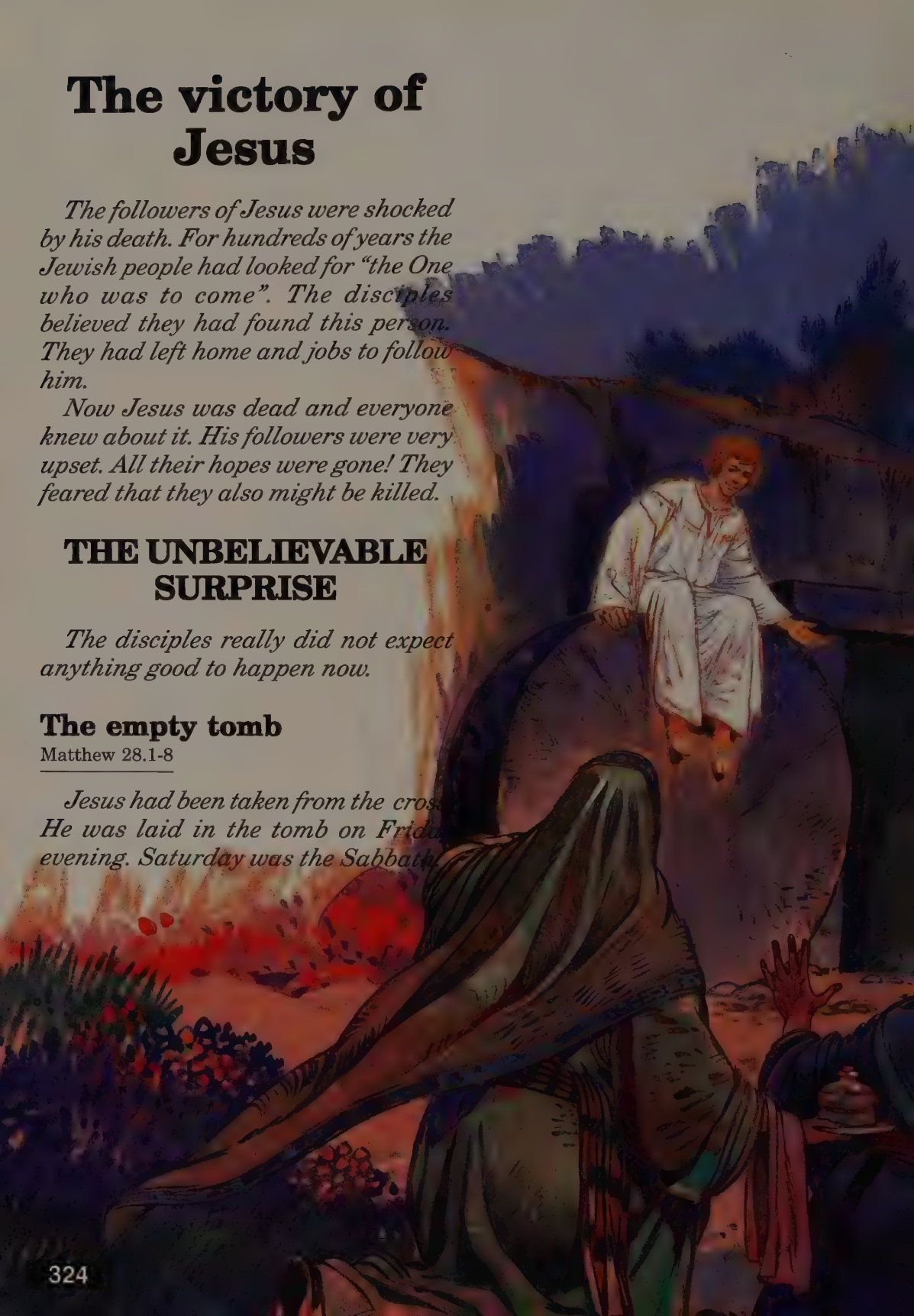
THE UNBELIEVABLE SURPRISE

The disciples really did not expect anything good to happen now.

The empty tomb

Matthew 28.1-8

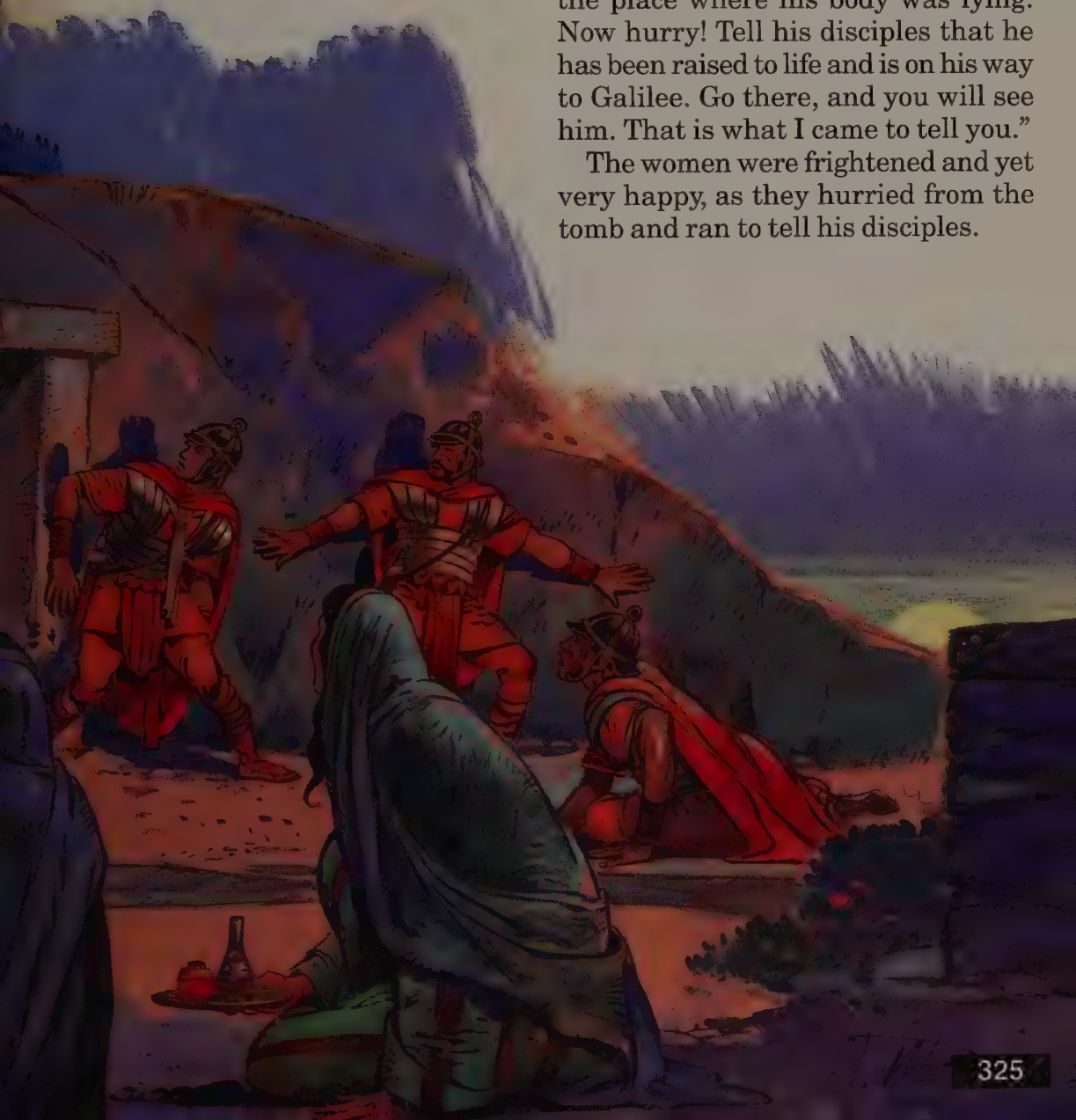
Jesus had been taken from the cross. He was laid in the tomb on Friday evening. Saturday was the Sabbath.



The Sabbath was over, and it was almost daybreak on Sunday when Mary Magdalene and other Mary went to see the tomb. Suddenly a strong earthquake struck, and the Lord's angel came down from heaven. He rolled away the stone and sat on it. The angel looked as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards shook from fear and fell down, as though they were dead.

The angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was nailed to a cross. He isn't here! God has raised him to life, just as Jesus said he would. Come, see the place where his body was lying. Now hurry! Tell his disciples that he has been raised to life and is on his way to Galilee. Go there, and you will see him. That is what I came to tell you."

The women were frightened and yet very happy, as they hurried from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples.



Then the women remembered what Jesus had said. They came back from the tomb. They told all these things to the eleven disciples and all the other followers of Jesus. They thought what the women said was not possible. So they did not believe the women.

Peter and John go to the tomb

John 20.3-10

Then Peter and John ran to the tomb. John ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down and saw the linen sheet, but he did not go in. Behind him came Peter. He went right into the tomb. He saw the linen sheet and the cloth which had been around the head of Jesus. The cloth was not lying with the linen sheet, but was rolled up by itself. John also went in. He saw and believed. They still did not understand the scripture which said that Jesus must rise from death. Then the disciples went home.

Mary's surprise

John 20.11-18

Later Mary Magdalene stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent down and looked in. She saw two angels dressed in white. They were sitting at each end of the place where the body of Jesus had been laid. They asked her, "Why are you crying?"

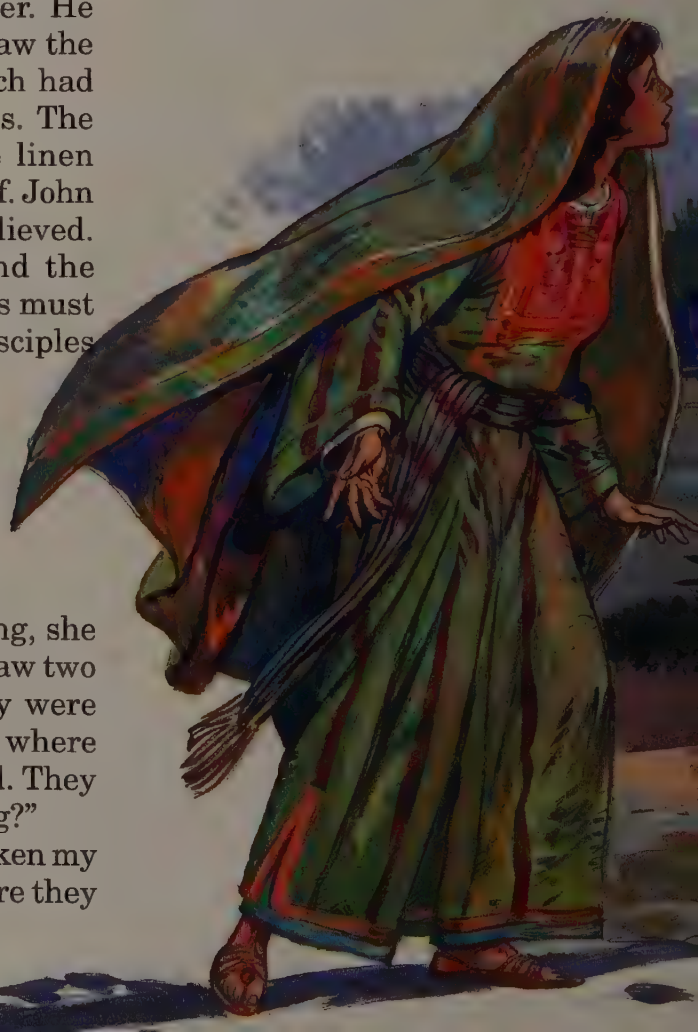
She answered, "They have taken my Master away. I don't know where they have put him!"

Then she turned and saw Jesus standing there. But she did not know that it was Jesus. "Why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Did you take him away, sir? Tell me where you have put him. I will go and get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

Moving towards him she said in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (This means "Teacher".)



"Do not hold me back," Jesus told her, "I have to go up to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God."

So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She also told them what he had said.

The report of the guards

Matthew 28.11-15

Some of the guards who had been ordered to watch the tomb went back to the city. They told the chief priests everything that had happened. The chief priests met with the elders and made their plan. They gave a large sum of money to the guards and said, "Say that his disciples came during the night and stole his body while you were asleep. If the governor should hear of this, we will speak to him.
You will have nothing to worry about."

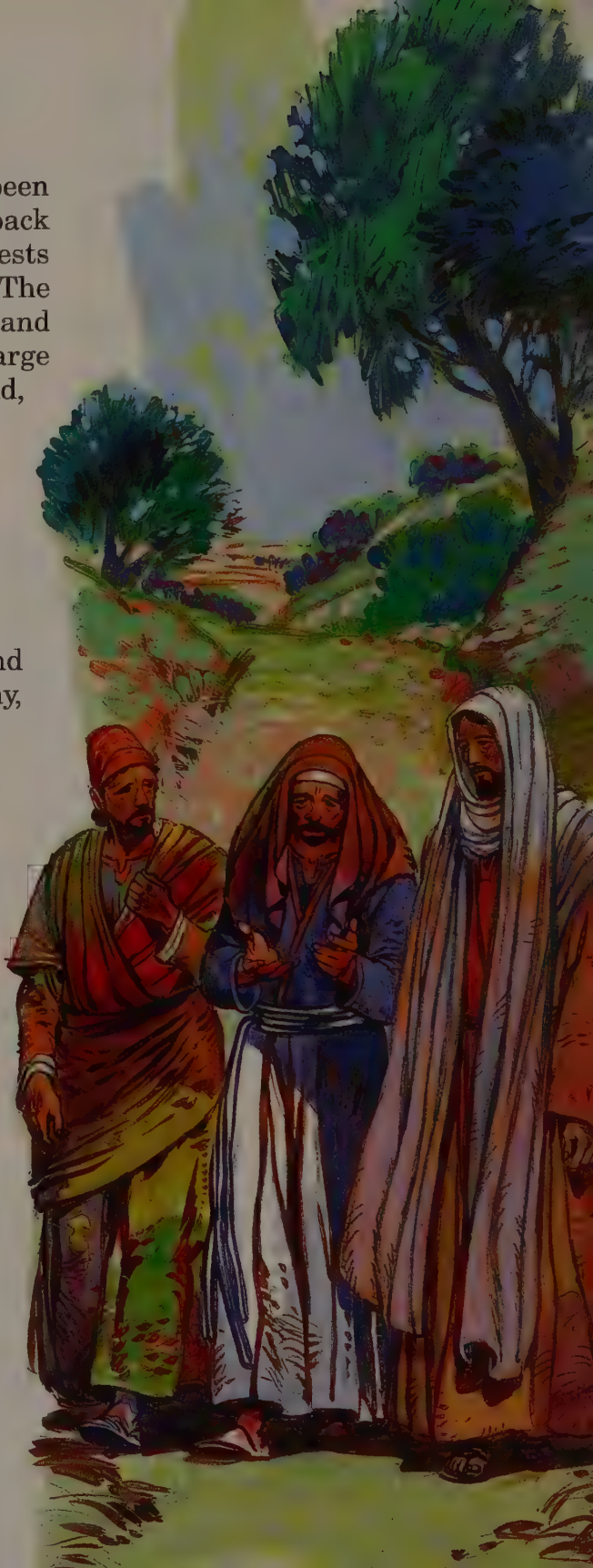
The guards took the money and did what they were told. To this day, that is the story among the Jews.

The walk to Emmaus

Luke 24.13-35

On the day when Jesus rose from death, two of the followers of Jesus were going to a village named Emmaus. It was eleven kilometres from Jerusalem, They were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. They saw him, but somehow did not know who he was. Jesus saidto them, "What are you talking about?"

They stood there, looking sad. One of them, called Cleopas, said to him, "So much has happened in Jerusalem the last few days. Are you the only one



who doesn't know these things?" "What things?" he asked. "The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "He was a prophet from God. Everyone knew he had the power of God in everything he said and did. But our chief priests and rulers had him crucified. We had hoped that he would be the One who was going to set our people free! This is now the third day since it happened. Some of the women of our group surprised us. They went to the tomb at dawn today. But they could not find his body. They came back saying two angels had told them that he is alive. Some of us went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said. His body was not there."

Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are! How slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! Was it not necessary for the Saviour to suffer these things before going back to be with God in glory?" Jesus then explained what was said about himself in all the Scriptures. He began with the books of Moses and then all that was written by the prophets.

As they came near Emmaus, it looked as if Jesus would go further. But they held him back, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. He sat down to eat with them. He took the bread, and gave thanks to God. Then he broke it and gave it to them. At once they knew who he was! Suddenly he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Wasn't it exciting when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures!"

They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples together with the others. They heard them saying, "The Lord is alive again! He has appeared to Simon Peter!"

Then the two explained what had happened to them on the road. They told how they had come to know the Lord when he broke the bread.

Jesus meets with his followers

John 20 . 19 - 23

On the Sunday evening the disciples gathered together and locked the doors as they were afraid of the Jews. Suddenly the Lord himself stood among them and said "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and his side. They were so full of joy when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I am sending you". Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins they are forgiven. If you do not forgive, they are nor forgiven".

Jesus came and stood among them and greeted them, "Peace be with you;" he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and feel my hands. Put your hand into the hole in my side. Stop doubting and believe!"

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

Jesus and Thomas

John 20.24-29

Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, was not with the others when Jesus came. So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "I must see the wounds of the nails in his hands. I must put my finger on those wounds and my hand in his side. Then only I will believe."

A week later, the disciples were again in the room. Thomas was with them. The doors were locked. But

Jesus at the lake

John 21.1-14

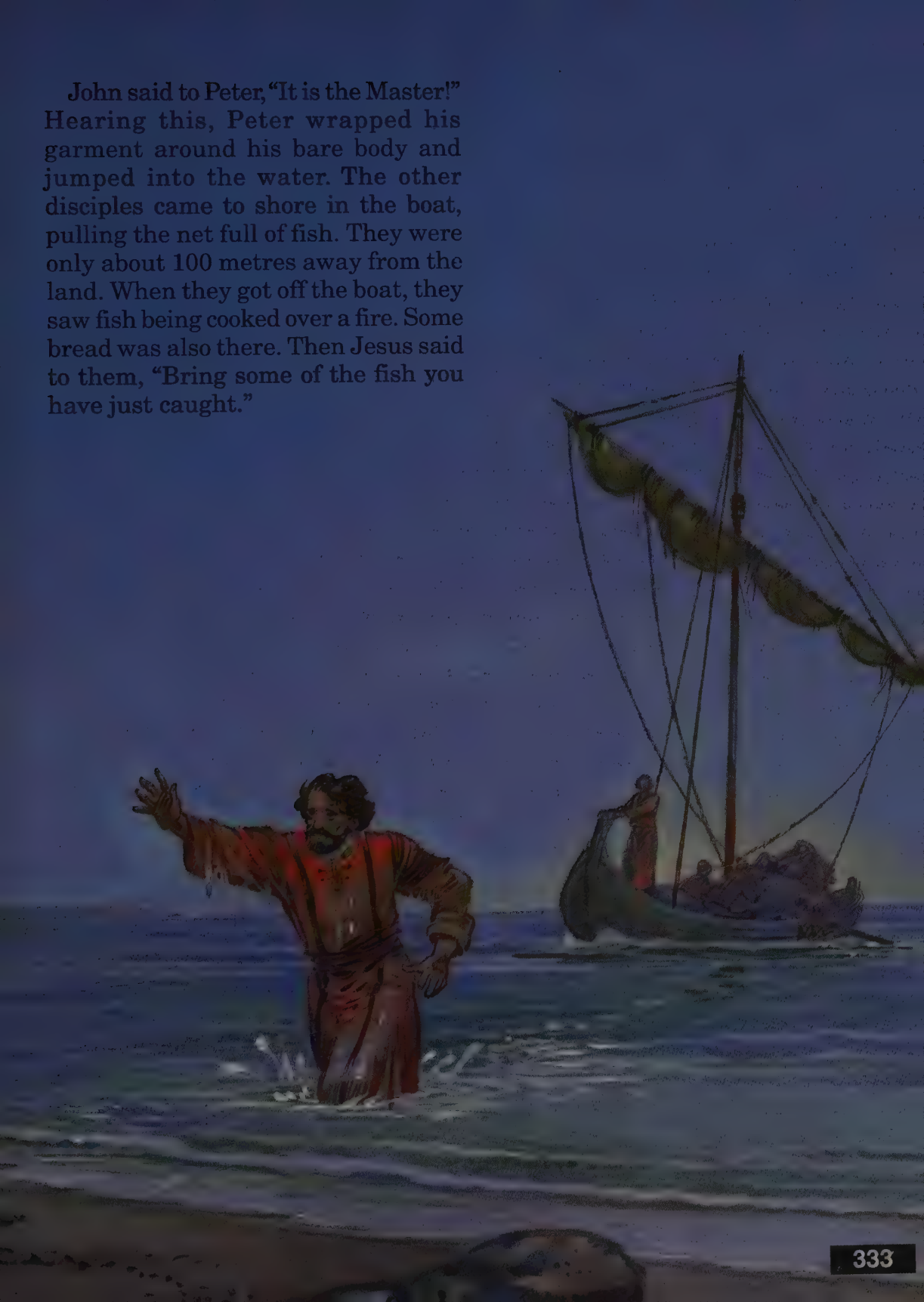
Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Galilee. This is how it happened. Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

"We will come with you," they told him. So they went out in a boat. But all that night they caught nothing! As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge. The disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then he asked them, "Friends, haven't you caught anything?"

They answered, "No, nothing!"

He said to them, "Throw your net out from the right side of the boat, and you will catch some." So they threw the net out, and could not pull it back into the boat, because they had caught so many fish.

John said to Peter, "It is the Master!" Hearing this, Peter wrapped his garment around his bare body and jumped into the water. The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were only about 100 metres away from the land. When they got off the boat, they saw fish being cooked over a fire. Some bread was also there. Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."



Peter went to the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full with 153 big fish. Even though there were so many fish, the net did not break. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples asked him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish.

This was the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

After they had eaten, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me more than these? Peter answered, "Yes, Lord you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

Jesus asked the question three times. Peter's response was that Jesus knew how much he loved him. Jesus asked Peter to take care of his sheep. Then Jesus told him about the way he was to die glorifying God.

His last instructions

Matthew 28.16-20; Acts 1.8

The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. He appeared to them, and they worshipped him, even though some doubted. Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all power in heaven and on earth. So you must go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. I will be with you always until the very end."

"When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power. You will speak the truth about me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

He is taken up to heaven

Acts 1.9-14

After saying this, he was lifted up until the clouds hid him from their sight.

They went on looking up at the sky. Then two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them. They said, "You, Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? You have seen Jesus taken up into heaven. He will come back in just the same way as you have seen him go." Then they went back to Jerusalem. When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. They all continued praying together with other men and women. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers prayed with them.

THE DISCIPLES ARE NEW MEN

The coming of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2.1-13

Pentecost was the name given to the festival held 50 days after the Passover. It was celebrated in memory of the time when God gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai. It also served as a harvest festival for the barley crop. Many Jews visited Jerusalem to share in this celebration. For Christians, Pentecost is related to the following events.

On the day of Pentecost, all who believed in Jesus Christ were gathered together in a house. Suddenly there was a noise from above. This noise filled the whole house. It sounded like a strong wind blowing. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person. They were all filled with the power of the Holy Spirit of God. They began talking in other languages.

Religious Jews from many countries had come to Jerusalem. Hearing the noise, they ran into the house. The crowd was excited, because each one heard the believers talking in his own language. In amazement and wonder they exclaimed, "These people who are talking like this are Galileans! How is it, then, that all of us hear them speaking in our own languages? We come from so many countries. We speak so many different languages. All of us hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things that God has done!" Amazed and confused, they kept asking each other, "What does this mean?"

But others made fun of the believers, saying, "These people are drunk!"

Peter's bold message

Acts 2.14-15,22-24,32-33,36-41

Then Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles. He began to speak to the crowd in a loud voice, "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, listen to me and let me tell you what this means. These people are not drunk, as you think. It is only nine o'clock in the morning!

"Listen to these words, my people! Jesus of Nazareth was a man from God. God worked through Jesus in all the miracles he did. You yourselves know this. You saw it all happen. It was all in God's plan that Jesus would be handed over to you. You killed him! You let sinful men crucify him. But God raised him from death. He set him free from its power. It was impossible for death to hold him.

"God the Father has raised Jesus from death and seated him with honour at his right side. Jesus has received from him the Holy Spirit, as God had promised. What you now see and hear is this gift that he has poured out on us.

"All you people of Israel should know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the One that God has made Lord and Saviour!"

When the people heard this, they were very troubled and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Friends, what shall we do?"

Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. God will forgive your sins. He will give you the gift of the Holy Spirit. For God's promise is for you and your children, and to all people everywhere."

Peter warned them, saying, "Save yourselves from the punishment that is going to fall on wicked people!" Many of them believed his message and were baptized. About 3,000 people joined the group that day.

How they lived

Acts 2.42-47

All the believers spent their time in learning from the apostles. They took their part in the fellowship. They shared in the Lord's Supper and the prayers. The apostles did many miracles. Everyone felt that God was with them. All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared what they had with one another. They would sell their belongings and give the money to those in need. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, praising God. They ate their meals together in their homes, with joy and thanks. Everyone thought so well of them. Every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

THEY COULD NOT BE STOPPED

Peter heals a lame man

Acts 3.1-10

One day Peter and John went to the Temple at three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour for prayer. At the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple was a man who had been lame all his life. Every day he was carried there to beg for money from the people going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John, he begged for money. They looked straight at him, and Peter said, "Look at us!" So he looked at them, hoping to get something. But Peter said to him, "I don't have money, but I'll give you what I have, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I order you to get up and walk!" Then he took him by his right hand, and helped him up. At once the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped up, stood on his feet, and started walking around. Then he went into the Temple with them, jumping with joy and praising God. People saw him walking and praising God. They found out that he was the beggar who used to sit at the "Beautiful Gate". How amazed they were!

Peter speaks out in the Temple

Acts 3.11-19

When Peter and John reached "Solomon's passage", the man was still with them. The people were still

amazed and ran to them. Peter said to them, "Friends, why are you so amazed? Why do you stare at us? Don't think that our own power or holiness has made this man walk. The God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has done this. He has honoured his Son Jesus. But you handed him over to be killed. You told Pilate that he was not your king. Pilate wanted to let him go, but you wouldn't. He was holy and good, but you rejected him and asked Pilate to free a murderer instead. You killed the One who gives life, but God raised him from death. We have seen this. The power in the name of Jesus gave strength to this lame man. Faith in Jesus has made him well. You all saw it happen!

"My brothers, I know you and your leaders did not know what you were doing to Jesus. God said long ago through the prophets that the Saviour must suffer and die. He made it come true in this way. Turn away from your sins, and turn to God. Then he will forgive your sins."

Peter and John stand before the Council

Acts 4.1-22

Peter and John were speaking to the people. Then some priests and Sadducees arrived with the officer in charge of the Temple guards. They were upset at the teaching of the two apostles. The apostles told the people that the dead will rise to life because Jesus had risen from death. So they took Peter and John and put them in jail for the night. But many who heard the message believed. The number of men grew to about 5,000.

The next day the Jewish leaders gathered in Jerusalem. They met with the High Priest Annas and with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the other members of the High Priest's family. They made the apostles stand before them and asked them, "How did you do this? What power do you have or whose name did you use?"

Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, answered them, "Leaders of the people and elders, you are questioning us today about the good deed done to the lame man and how he was healed. You and all Israelites should know that he stands healed here before you through the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. You crucified him, but God raised him from death. Jesus is the One of whom the scripture says,

'The stone that the builders rejected
became the most important of all.'

Salvation is to be found through Jesus alone. He is God's gift to us. In all the world no one else can save us."

The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were. They learnt that the two were simple uneducated men. They also came to know that the men had been with Jesus. But they could say nothing because the healed man was standing there with Peter and John. So they told them to leave the Council room. Then the Council leaders talked together. "What shall we do with these men?"

they asked. "Everyone in Jerusalem knows that this miracle has happened because of them. We cannot deny it. But let us warn these men never to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus. That will keep them from spreading their teaching."
So they called them in. They were ordered to stop using the name of Jesus when they speak or teach. But Peter and John answered them, "You yourselves decide which is right in God's sight. Should we obey you or obey God? For we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard."

So the Council warned them very strongly and then let them go. They saw that it was impossible to punish them, because the people were all praising God for what had happened. The man who got healed through this miracle was over 40 years old.

Many healed by God

Acts 5.12-16

All the believers met together in "Solomon's Passage". Many others were afraid to join them, even though they spoke well of them. But more and more men and women who believed in the Lord were added to the group.

The apostles did many miracles among the people. Those who came to know about this brought the sick out into the streets. They placed them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds of people came in from the towns around Jerusalem. They brought those who were sick or who had demons. All of them were healed.

The apostles are arrested

Acts 5.17-35,38-42

Then the High Priest and all his followers, who were Sadducees, became very jealous of the apostles. So they decided to do something against them. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But that night God's angel opened the prison gates. He led the apostles out and said to them, "Go and stand in the Temple. Tell the people everything about this new life." The apostles obeyed. At dawn they entered the Temple and started teaching.

The High Priest called for a full meeting of the Council. An order was sent to the jail for the apostles to be brought before them. When the officials arrived, they could not find the apostles in the jail. So they returned to the Council saying, "We found the jail locked up and all the guards on watch at the gates. But when we opened the gates, we found no one inside!" When the chief priests and the officer in charge of the guards heard this, they wondered what had happened to the apostles. Then a man came in and said to them, "Listen! The men you put in prison are in the Temple teaching the people!" So the officer went off with his men and brought the apostles back. They did not use force, because they were afraid that the people might stone them.

They brought the apostles in, and made them stand before the Council. The High Priest questioned them. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in the name of that man," he said. "But see what you have done! You have spread your teaching all over Jerusalem. You are trying to blame us for his death!"

Peter and the other apostles answered, "We must obey God, not men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus from death, after you had him crucified. God raised him to sit at his right side as Lord and Saviour. God is giving the people of Israel another chance to turn away from their sins and be forgiven. This is what we are telling everyone. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to those who obey him."

When the members of the Council heard this, they were so upset that they wanted to have the apostles put to death. But one of them, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, stood up in the Council. He was a religious teacher and was highly respected by all the people. He ordered the apostles to be taken outside for a while. Then he said to the Council, "My people, be careful what you do to these men. Do nothing against them in a hurry. Leave them alone! If what they do is from men, it will die out. But if it comes from God, you cannot defeat them. You might even be fighting against God!" The Council followed Gamaliel's advice. They called the apostles in again, and had them whipped. The apostles were ordered not to speak about Jesus any more. Then they were set free. How happy the apostles were! God had chosen them to suffer for the sake of Jesus. Every day they visited the Temple and people's homes. They went on teaching and preaching the Good News about Jesus the Saviour.

The Good News spreads

So far we have seen that God had spoken mainly to the people of Israel, who were known as Jews. God spoke to them through people like Abraham and Jacob. Then he spoke through Moses and the prophets, and finally through the Lord Jesus.

Peter and the apostles soon understood that the Good News about Jesus was for everyone. They knew God was calling them to spread his message everywhere.

A NEW APOSTLE IS CALLED

Saul hates the Good News

Acts 8.1-3

Saul was a well-educated Pharisee. He was sure that the followers of Jesus should be destroyed. He wanted to protect the Jewish religion from the Way of Jesus.

Stephen, a young believer in Jesus, was stoned to death by the Jewish leaders. Saul was happy to see Stephen die.

On the day Stephen was killed, cruel Jews in Jerusalem began to trouble the followers of Jesus. Some good men, who were very sad about Stephen's death, buried him. All the believers, except the apostles, fled to different parts of Judea and Samaria.

Saul also troubled the believers. He went from house to house, dragging out men and women and sending them to jail.

On the road to Damascus

Acts 9.1-19

Saul kept threatening to murder the followers of the Lord. He took letters from the High Priest to the Jewish leaders in the city of Damascus. He wanted to arrest the believers there and bring them to Jerusalem.

As Saul came near Damascus, suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you giving me trouble?"

"Who are you, Lord?" he asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you hurt," the voice said. "Get up and go into the city. There you will be told what to do."

The men who were travelling with Saul stood there, but said nothing. They heard the voice, but could not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground. He opened his eyes, but could not see. So the men took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or

drink.There was a follower of Jesus in Damascus named Ananias.

The Lord called him in a vision, saying, "Ananias!"

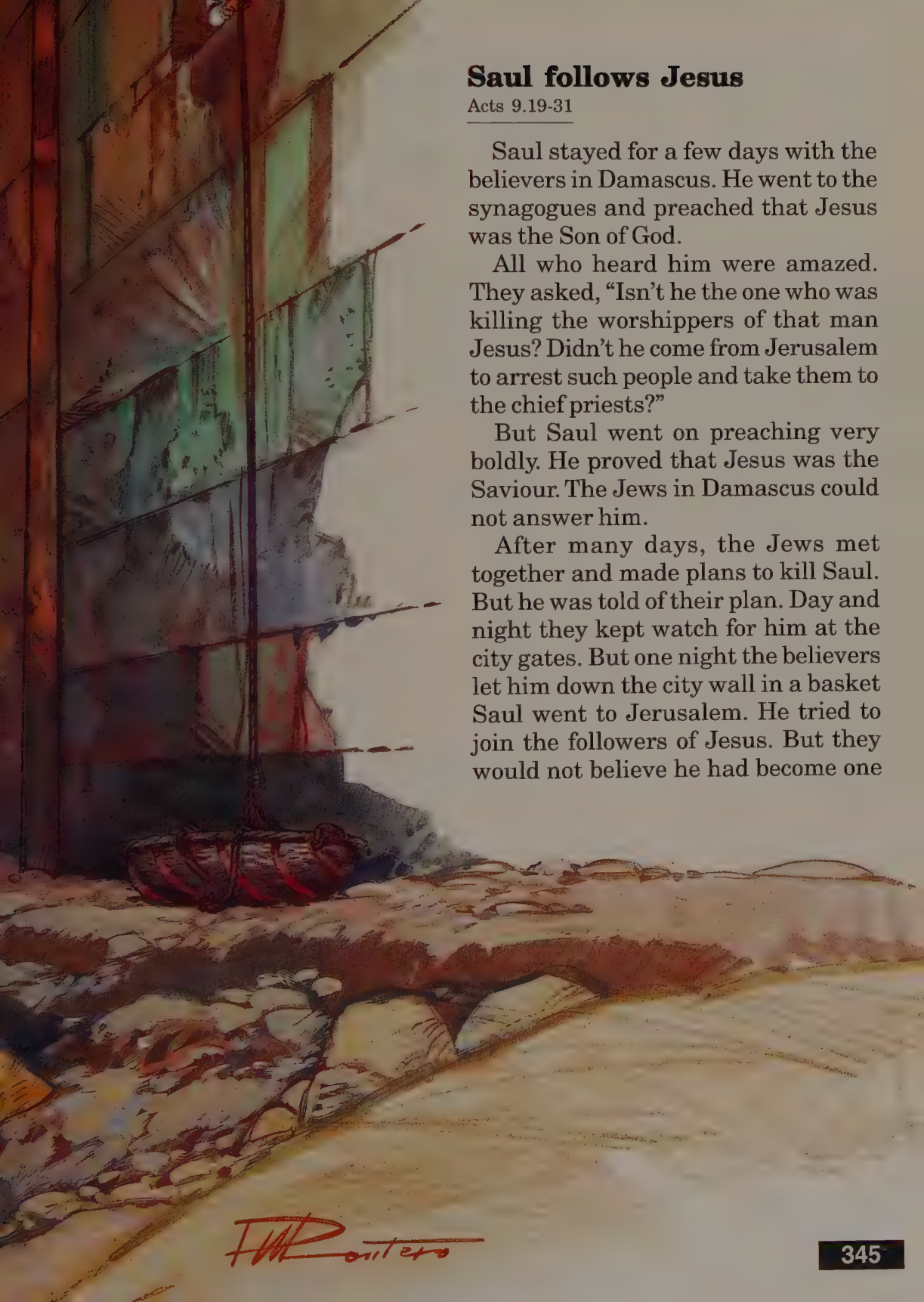
"Here I am, Lord," he answered.

The Lord said to him, "Get ready and go to Straight Street. Find the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying and has had a vision. In this vision a man named Ananias came in and put his hands on him, so that he could see again."

Ananias answered, "Lord, many people have told me about this man. He has done many terrible things to your people in Jerusalem. Now he has come to Damascus to arrest all who worship you. The chief priests have given him permission to do this."

The Lord said to him, "Go, I have chosen Saul to serve me. He must make my name known to other peoples and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him all that he must suffer for my sake."

So Ananias went. He entered the house where Saul was, and put his hands on him. "Brother Saul!" he said, "the Lord Jesus has sent me. Jesus himself appeared to you on your way here. He has sent me so that you might see again, and receive the power of the Holy Spirit." At once something like scabs fell from Saul's eyes, and he was able to see again! He got up and was baptized. After eating some food, he got back his strength.



Saul follows Jesus

Acts 9.19-31

Saul stayed for a few days with the believers in Damascus. He went to the synagogues and preached that Jesus was the Son of God.

All who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Isn't he the one who was killing the worshippers of that man Jesus? Didn't he come from Jerusalem to arrest such people and take them to the chief priests?"

But Saul went on preaching very boldly. He proved that Jesus was the Saviour. The Jews in Damascus could not answer him.

After many days, the Jews met together and made plans to kill Saul. But he was told of their plan. Day and night they kept watch for him at the city gates. But one night the believers let him down the city wall in a basket Saul went to Jerusalem. He tried to join the followers of Jesus. But they would not believe he had become one

of them. They were all afraid of him. Then Barnabas came to his help and took him to the apostles. He explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on his way to Damascus. He told how the Lord had spoken to him and how Saul had boldly preached in Damascus about Jesus.

Saul stayed with them and spoke in the name of the Lord Jesus all over Jerusalem. He also talked and argued with the Jews who spoke Greek. But they tried to kill him. When the believers found out about this, they took Saul to Caesarea. From there they sent him back to Tarsus, his home city.

After this the believers became known as the "church". Throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria they had a time of peace. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the church became stronger. It grew in numbers, because the believers tried to please the Lord in all their ways.

THE NON - JEWS HEAR THE GOOD NEWS

After Saul decided to follow Jesus, he became a changed person. Later he became known as Paul. He went on three great missionary journeys. He preached about Jesus and started churches in many important towns and cities. During these journeys he had many adventures. Luke, a Greek doctor, who travelled with Paul, tells us about some of them.

Paul jailed in Philippi

Acts 16.16-39

We were in the city of Philippi and were going to the place of prayer. A slave girl met us. She had an evil spirit. She used to tell fortunes and earn a lot of money for her owners. She followed us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God! They are telling you how you can be saved!" She did this for many days. One day Paul became so upset that he turned around and said to the evil spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I order you to come out!" At once the evil spirit went out of her.

Her owners saw that their chance of making money was gone. So they got hold of Paul and his friend Silas and dragged them to the market place. Here they brought them before the Roman officials and said, "These men are Jews. They are causing trouble in our city. They teach things that are not right for us Romans." The crowd also began to attack Paul and Silas.

Then the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be whipped. They were beaten again and again and thrown into jail. The jailer was ordered to lock them up. He put them far inside the jail. Their feet were fixed between heavy blocks of wood.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. The other prisoners were listening. Suddenly there was a terrible earthquake! It shook the prison walls and floors. All the doors opened!

The chains fell off all the prisoners! The jailer woke up and saw the prison doors open. He thought that the prisoners had already escaped. So he pulled out his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted at the top of his voice, "Don't hurt yourself! We are all here!"

The jailer called for a light. Then he rushed inside and fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. He led them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

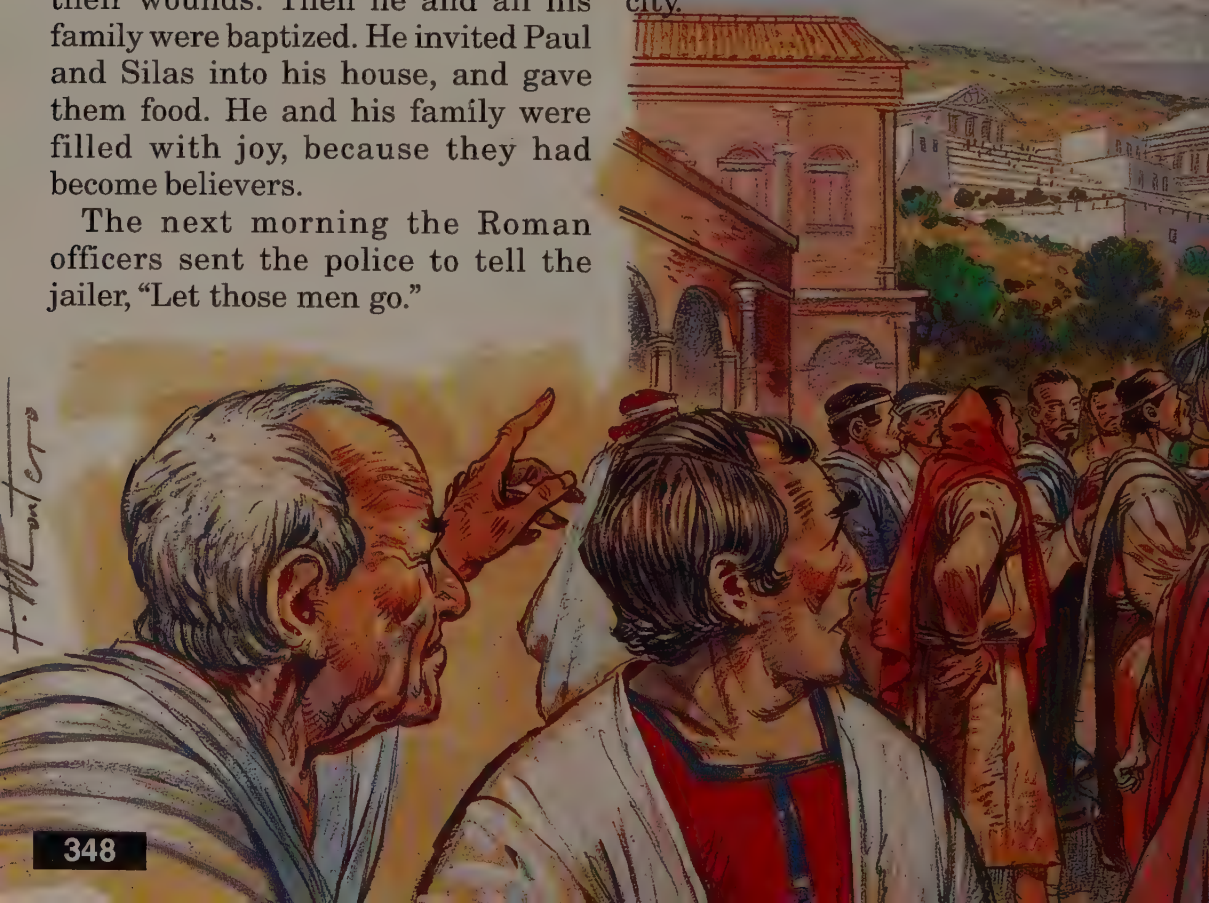
They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your family will be saved!" Then they preached the word of the Lord to him and to all present. At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds. Then he and all his family were baptized. He invited Paul and Silas into his house, and gave them food. He and his family were filled with joy, because they had become believers.

The next morning the Roman officers sent the police to tell the jailer, "Let those men go."

The jailer told Paul, "The officers have sent an order for you and Silas to go free. You may leave now. Go in peace!"

But Paul said to the police, "We were not found guilty of any wrong. Yet they whipped us in public, even though we are Roman citizens! Then they put us in prison. Now they want to send us away secretly. Not at all! Let the officers come themselves and let us out."

The police told these words to the Roman officers. When they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid. So they came and told Paul and Silas they were sorry. Then they led them out of the prison and asked them to leave the city.



Paul in Athens

Acts 17.16-34

Paul was waiting in Athens for his friends Silas and Timothy. He was very upset when he saw idols all over the city. In the synagogue he talked with the Jews and the non-Jews who worshipped the true God. He also talked every day with the people in the market place. Some very clever teachers argued with him. Some of them asked, "What is all this talk about? What is he trying to say?"

Others answered, "He seems to be talking about foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching about the "risen" Jesus. They brought Paul to the City Court and said, "We would like to know more about your new teaching. Some of the things you say are so strange to us. Could you tell us what they mean?" The people of Athens and the foreigners who lived there liked to spend all their time talking and hearing about anything new.

Paul stood up in front of the City Court and said, "People of Athens, I see that you are very religious. I walked through your city and looked at your places of worship. I found an altar on which it is written, 'To an Unknown God.' You worship a god you don't know. This is the God I am telling you about! He is the God who made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in man-made temples. He gives life and breath and everything to all people. God first made one man. From that one man came the peoples now living all over the world. God wanted people to look all around and find him. Really he is not far from any one of us. Someone has said,

'We live in him, we move in him,
we are in him.'
Even some of your own poets
have said,
'We too are his children.'

Since we are God's children, you must not think that God is like an idol of gold or silver or stone. God has overlooked the times when people did not know him. But now he commands all people everywhere to turn away from their evil ways. He has fixed a day in which he will judge everyone fairly. He will use a Man to do this. He chose that Man long ago. God has made this clear to all by raising the Man Jesus from death!"

When they heard Paul speak about the risen Jesus, some of them made fun of him. Others said, "We want to listen to you again." So Paul left the meeting.

Some people believed the Good News about Jesus and joined Paul. Among them was a city official and many other important people.

The riot in Ephesus

Acts 19.24-41

Paul travelled to many countries with the Good News. He faced serious trouble while in Ephesus, an important city in the province of Asia (now in Turkey).

Demetrius, a rich silversmith, had a big business. He engaged many workers making silver models of the temple of the goddess Artemis. He called all the workers together and said to them, "Men, we earn our living from this work. You know what this fellow Paul is doing to us. He says that man-made gods are not gods at all! He has many followers here in Ephesus and many other places. So our business will soon go down. So will the name and fame of this temple and our goddess Artemis. She has been worshipped by everyone here and everywhere. But she will soon be forgotten!"

As the crowd heard these words, they became very angry. They shouted, "Great is Artemis of Ephesus!" The riot spread through the whole city. The mob got hold of two men, who had come with Paul, and rushed to the stadium. Paul wanted to go before the crowd, but the believers would not let him. He

had friends among the officials. They also sent him word not to show himself in the stadium. Meanwhile there was a great uproar. Some were shouting one thing, others were shouting something else. Most of them did not even know why they were there! Some in the crowd saw the Jews leading a man named Alexander to the front. They thought he was the trouble-maker! Alexander waved his hand for the people to be silent, and tried to speak. But soon they came to know he was a Jew. So the crowd shouted together for two hours, "Great is Artemis of Ephesus!"

At last the mayor of the city was able to calm the crowd. "Fellow Ephesians!" he said. "Everyone knows that the city of Ephesus looks after the temple of the great Artemis. The sacred stone that fell down from heaven is also worshipped here. Nobody can deny these things. So then, you must calm down and think carefully before you do anything. Why have you brought these men here? They have not robbed any temple or said anything against our goddess. Demetrius and his workers may have some complaint against someone. Let them bring it before the city judges on the regular court days. Anything more serious can be taken to the City Court. The Romans may blame us for this rioting. We will have no good reason to give." Then he sent the people away.

PAUL GETS HIS WISH AT LAST

The plan to kill Paul

Acts 23.11-24

One night the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Don't be afraid! You have spoken boldly for me here in Jerusalem. You must also do the same in Rome."

The next morning about 40 Jews made a plan together. They took a vow not to eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. Then they went to the chief priests and other Jewish leaders. They said, "We have taken a vow not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now you must send word to the Roman commander to bring Paul out to you. Tell him you want to ask Paul more questions. We will be ready to kill him while he is on his way here."

Paul's nephew heard about this cruel plan. He went to the fort and told Paul. Paul called an officer and said to him, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something to tell him." The officer led him to the commander, and said, "Paul, the prisoner, asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to tell you."

The commander took him by the hand to a quiet place and asked, "What do you want to tell me?"

He said, "The Jewish leaders have planned to ask you to take Paul to their special meeting tomorrow. They want you to think that they are going to ask him more questions. But don't listen to them! There are more than 40 men who will be hiding and waiting for him. They have taken a vow not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are just waiting for you to agree to meet them."

The commander said, "Don't tell anyone you have reported this to me." He quickly sent the young man away.

The commander called two of his officers and said, "Get 200 soldiers ready to go to Caesarea. Also get 70 horsemen and 200 men with spears. Be ready to leave by nine o'clock tonight. Have some horses ready for Paul's long journey. Be sure you get him safely through to the governor in Caesarea."

Governor Felix kept Paul ready for trial in Caesarea. The Jews tried very hard to make Felix believe that Paul was guilty. They wanted to have him killed. Although not found guilty, he was kept under house arrest. Two years later, Festus took over from Felix as the new governor.

Paul wants to go to the Emperor

Acts 25.9-12

Festus wanted to gain favour with the Jews. So he asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried before me there?"

Paul said, "This is the Roman Emperor's court, and I must be tried here. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If I have done something against the law and must die, I do not ask to be freed. But if their charges against me are false, no one can hand me over to

them. I appeal to the Emperor in Rome."

Then Festus talked with his advisers. He said to Paul, "You have appealed to the Emperor. So you will be sent to Rome!"

He sails for Rome

Acts 27.1-12

Long before his arrest, Paul had wanted to go to Rome. Now he was going there, but as a prisoner. During this long journey by sea, many unexpected and surprising things happened. Here is the story of that voyage written by Luke, who travelled with Paul.

It was decided that we should sail to Rome in Italy. Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to Julius, a Roman army officer. We went aboard a ship and sailed away. The next day we arrived at Sidon. Julius was kind to Paul and allowed him to go and see his friends. They gave him what he needed. As we left Sidon, the winds were blowing against us. We sailed close to the island of Cyprus. We crossed over the sea and came to Myra. There Julius put us on a ship from Alexandria that was going to Italy.

We sailed slowly for several days. With great difficulty we finally arrived at another port. The wind would not let us go any further. So we sailed down towards the island of Crete. We kept close to its coast. With great difficulty we came to a port called Safe Harbours.

We spent a long time there. It was dangerous to continue the trip as it was the season of terrible storms. So Paul gave the sailors this advice, "Friends, if we sail any further, it will be dangerous for the ship and for the goods. Even our lives may be lost!" But instead of listening to Paul, Julius listened to the captain and the owner of the ship. They said the harbour was not suitable during the winter. So most of the men wanted to sail on to Phoenix in Crete. This would be a much safer harbour.

A terrible storm

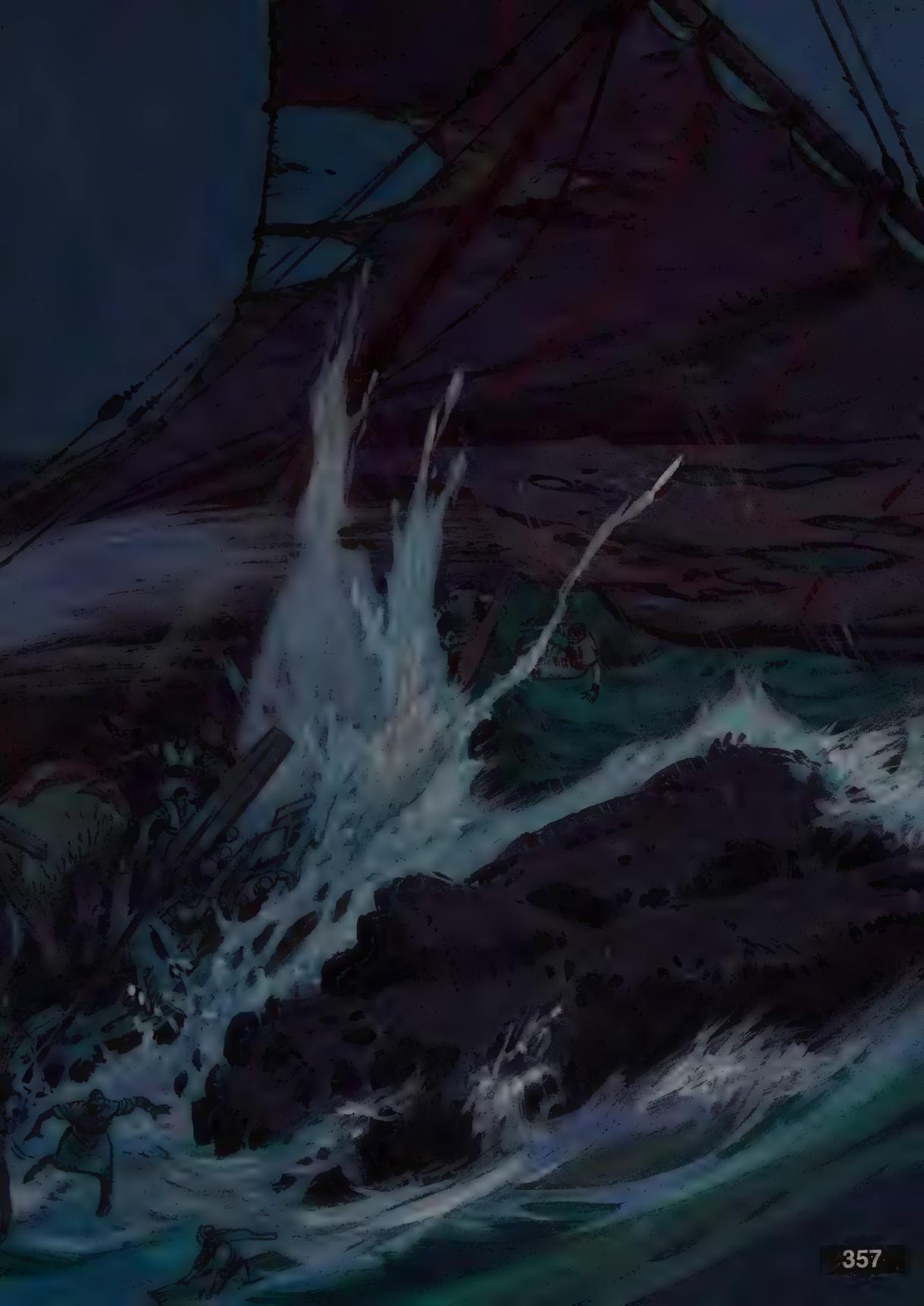
Acts 27.13-38

A soft wind from the south began to blow. The sailors thought they could carry out their plan. So they pulled up the anchor and sailed as close as possible along the coast of Crete. But soon the ship was caught in a very strong wind called "Northeaster" blowing from the island. So we had to let the ship be carried by the wind. We managed to pull up the life boat on to the deck. The sailors then tied some ropes around the ship. They were afraid that it might run into some sandbanks near the coast. So they took the sail down and let the wind carry the ship. The terrible storm continued. They began to throw some of the goods overboard. A day later, they threw out other things. For many days we could not see the sun or the stars. The wind kept on blowing very hard. We thought for sure we would die!

The men had gone a long time without food. Then one day Paul stood before them and said, "Friends, you should have listened to me and not sailed from Crete. Then all this

damage and loss would not have happened. But now I beg you, don't worry! Not one of you will lose his life. Only the ship will be lost. For last night an angel from God came to me. This is the God I worship. The angel said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul! You must stand before the Emperor in Rome. God in his goodness will save the lives of all who are sailing with you.' So brothers, let us not lose hope! For I trust in God to take care of us. But we will be driven ashore on some island."

It was the fourteenth night since we had been caught in the storm. About midnight the sailors thought we were getting close to land. So they measured and found the water was 40 metres deep. A little later they did the same, and found it was 30 metres deep. They were afraid the ship would hit the rocks. So they lowered four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight. Then the sailors



tried to escape from the ship. They lowered the boat into the water as if they were going to put out some anchors from the front of the ship. But Paul said to Julius and his soldiers, "If the sailors don't stay on board, you have no hope of being saved." So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the boat and let it go. Just before dawn, Paul begged them all to eat some food, "You have been waiting for 14 days without any food. I want you to eat something. You need it if you are to live. Not even a hair of your head will be lost!" Then Paul took some bread, thanked God, and ate it. All the others also began to eat. There were 276 of us on board. After everyone had eaten enough, they made the ship lighter by throwing all the wheat into the sea.

'Leave the ship!'

Acts 27.39-44

When daylight came, the sailors saw land. But they did not know where they were. They saw a bay with a beach, and wanted to land there. So they cut off the anchors. They also untied the ropes that held the steering oars. Then they raised the front sail, hoping the wind would blow the ship to the shore. But the ship hit a sandbank and its front part got stuck. The very rough sea began to break the back of the ship into pieces..

The soldiers made a plan to kill all the prisoners. They were afraid they would swim to shore and escape. But Julius wanted to save Paul, so he

stopped the soldiers. He ordered all the men who could swim to jump into the water and swim to the shore. The others floated, holding on to the broken pieces of the ship. At last we all got safely ashore.

On the island of Malta

Acts 28.1-10

After we were safe on land, we learned it was the island of Malta. The people were very friendly to us. It had started to rain and was cold, so they made a fire for us. Paul gathered up a bundle of sticks. When he was putting them on the fire, a snake came out because of the heat. It stuck to his hand. The people saw the snake hanging from Paul's hand! They said to one another, "This man must be a murderer. The gods will not let him live, even though he has escaped from the sea!" But Paul shook the snake off into the fire. No harm came to him. They were sure he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But even after waiting for a long time, no such thing happened to him. So they changed their minds and said, "He is a god!"

Publius, the chief of the island, had his farm nearby. He welcomed us kindly. For three days we were his guests. His father was in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul went to him and prayed. He placed his hands on him and healed him. Then all the other sick people on the island also came, and were healed. They gave us many gifts. Later when we set sail on another ship, the people gave us what we needed for the voyage.

In Rome at last!

Acts 28.16-31

At last we arrived in Rome! Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier guarding him.

After three days, Paul called the Jewish leaders to a meeting. He said to them, "My dear brothers, I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers. But I was made a prisoner in Jerusalem, and handed over to the Romans. The Romans asked many questions. But they found that I had done nothing for which I should die! They wanted to let me go free. But our people there did not want that. So I had to ask to come to Rome and stand before Caesar. I have no complaints to make against my own people. That is why I asked to see and talk with you. I am bound in chains because of the Saviour. He is the One the people of Israel are hoping for."

The Jews said to him, "We have not received any letters from Judea about you. None of our people from there have brought any news. They have said nothing against you. So we would like to hear what you have to say. We know that everywhere people speak against your group!"

So they set a date with Paul. A large number of Jews came that day to Paul's place. The whole day he explained the message about God's ways. He tried to make them believe the truth about Jesus. He used the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets in telling them about Jesus. Only some believed his words. As they left, they did not agree with each other. Then Paul had said to them, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth about you through the prophet Isaiah,

'You will listen and listen, but not understand.
You will look and look, but not see.
Because of your stubborn minds,
you have closed your ears,
you have shut your eyes.
If they would turn to me, says God,
I would heal them.' "

Paul finished by saying, "I want you Jews to know that God's message of salvation has now been taken to other peoples. They will listen!"

Paul stayed two full years in a rented house. He welcomed all who visited him. He kept on preaching and teaching God's ways. He was not afraid to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ. No one tried to stop him.

PAUL'S TEACHING

Paul started many churches during his missionary journeys. He wrote many letters to them and to other churches. He answered questions that the early Christians asked. A number of these letters are in the Bible. They tell us about Paul's helpful teaching to the first Christian churches.

God's Good News

Romans 1.16-17

I am proud of the Good News. It is God's power to save all who believe, Jews and non-Jews. For the Good News shows how God puts people right with himself. It is through faith from beginning to end.

God's anger

Romans 1.18,21,23,25

God's anger is against all the sin and evil things that people do. Their evil ways hide the truth. They think evil things. Their foolish minds are filled with darkness. They do not worship God who lives forever. They worship images made to look like people, birds, animals or snakes. They change the truth about God. They believe a lie!

God's plan

Ephesians 1.9-11;2.13

God told me the secret plan he had already made. This plan God will complete when the time is right. He will bring together everything in heaven and on earth.

All things are done as God plans. God chose us to be his own people, to be one with Christ. We were far away from God. But now we are brought near to him by Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Made right with God

Romans 3.22-26

God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. Everyone has sinned and is far away from God. He wants to save us. Now by the free gift of God's grace, all are put right with him. Christ Jesus sets them free from sin. God planned that by his Son's death people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. In the past he was patient and held back punishment for people's sins. But now God receives those who believe in Jesus as good and right.

Be made new

Romans 12.2; Ephesians 4.23; Galatians 5.16,22,25

Do not be like the people of this world. But be changed within by a new way of thinking.

Let your hearts and minds be made new. Then you will be able to live a good and upright life.

Let the Spirit of God guide your lives. Then you will not be led by your own

selfish ways. God's Spirit puts into our heart love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. We get our new life from his Spirit. So we should be led by the Spirit of God.

Be loving

Colossians 3.14; 1 Corinthians 13.4-8;14.1;16.14

To all these good things, add more and more love. Love holds us all together. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or proud. Love is not rude to others. Love is not selfish. Love does not get angry easily. Love does not keep a record of the wrongs that others do. Love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up. Love trusts, love hopes, love suffers. Love never ends. Let love be your goal. Do all your work in love.

Be obedient

Ephesians 6.1-4

Children, obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do. "Respect your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise added, "All will be well with you, and you will live a long time." Parents, do not make your children angry, but bring them up with the training and teaching of the Lord.

Be forgiving

Colossians 3.12-13

You are God's people. He loved you and chose you for his own. Do not be angry with each other. Forgive whenever anyone does wrong to you. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.

Be joyful and thankful

Philippians 4.4-7

Be full of joy always because you belong to the Lord. Again I say, be full of joy. Let everyone see how gentle you are. The Lord is coming soon. Do not worry about anything, but in all your prayers, ask God for what you need. Always ask him with a thankful heart. Then God's peace will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. The peace that God gives is so great we cannot understand it!

PAUL'S TESTIMONY

His suffering

2 Corinthians 11.24-29

Five times I was given the 39 lashes by the Jews. Three times I was whipped by the Romans. Once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks. Once I spent 24 hours in water. In my many travels, I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from non-Jews. There have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the countryside, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. I have had to work very hard. Often I have gone without sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty. I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. When someone is weak, then I feel weak too. When someone sins, I am full of sorrow.

His last words

2 Timothy 4.6-8

The time has come for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race. I have run the full distance. I have kept my promise to God. The prize of victory for a righteous life is waiting for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give that prize. All who wait with love for him to come will receive it.

JOHN'S VISIONS

John sees Jesus in heaven

Revelation 1.10-18

John, a follower of Jesus, was imprisoned on an island called Patmos. There he had a vision of the Lord Jesus in heaven. He also had visions of what was going to take place in heaven and on earth.

On the Lord's day, I came under the power of God's Spirit. I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet. It said, "Write in a book what you see and send the message to the leaders of the seven churches."

I turned around to see who was talking to me. I saw seven gold lampstands. Among them was someone who looked like a man. He was wearing a robe that reached to his feet. He had a golden belt around his chest. His hair was very white. His eyes were like flames of fire. His feet shone like polished brass. His voice sounded like the loud noise of a waterfall. He held seven stars in his right hand. A sharp two-edged sword came out of his mouth. His face was as bright as the sun at noon. I fell down at his feet like a dead man. He then placed his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living One! I was dead, but now I am alive for ever and ever. I have power over death and the world of the dead!"

Jesus is worshipped in heaven

Revelation 4.1-6,8-11;5.11-14

A lamb was the animal that the Jews sacrificed for their sins. Jesus is the "Lamb of God". He offered himself on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.
Later I had another vision. I saw a door that was open in heaven.

A voice that sounded like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this." At once I came under the power of God's Spirit. There in heaven was a throne with someone sitting on it. His face shone like precious stones. All around the throne there was a bright green light like a rainbow.

Twenty-four elders fall down and worship the One who sits on the throne and lives for ever and ever.

Again I looked. This time I heard millions of angels! They stood around the throne. They sang in a loud voice,

"The Lamb who was killed is worthy
to receive power, wealth,
wisdom, and strength,
honour, glory, and praise!"

Then I heard every living thing in

heaven and on earth and in the world below and in the sea singing,

"To him who sits on the throne
and to the Lamb,
be all praise and honour, glory
and power,
for ever and ever! Amen!"

The new heaven and the new earth

Revelation 21.1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth and the sea had passed away. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, come down out of heaven from God. This city looked like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne, "Now God's home is with all people! God himself will live with them. They will be his people. He will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness or crying or pain. All the old things are gone!"

Then the one sitting on the throne said, "Now I am making all things new!"

The new Jerusalem

Revelation 21.10-27

God's Spirit took control of me, and the angel carried me to the top of a very high mountain. He showed me Jerusalem, the Holy City, shining with the glory of God. The city shone like a precious stone, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with twelve gates and with twelve angels in charge of the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of the people of Israel. There were three gates on each side. The city's wall was built on twelve foundation-stones. The names of the twelve apostles were written on the stones. The angel who spoke to me had a golden rod to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city was square. It was 2,400 kilometres on each side, and as wide and as high as it was long. The wall was sixty metres high. The wall was made of jasper. The city itself was made of pure gold, as clear as glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were decorated with all kinds of precious stones. The twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each gate was made from one single pearl.

I did not see a temple in the city. The LORD God Almighty and the Lamb are the city's temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it. The glory of God shines on it, and the Lamb is its light. The peoples of the world will walk by its light. The kings of the earth will bring their wealth into it. The gates of the city will stand open all day. They will never be shut, because there will be no night there. The greatness and the wealth of the nations will be brought into the city. But nothing that is impure will enter the city. No one who does shameful things or tells lies will be allowed to enter. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the city.

Jesus is coming!

Revelation 22.16-17,20-21

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to announce these things to you in the churches. I am a descendant of the family of David. I am the bright morning star."

The Spirit of God and the Bride say, "Come!"

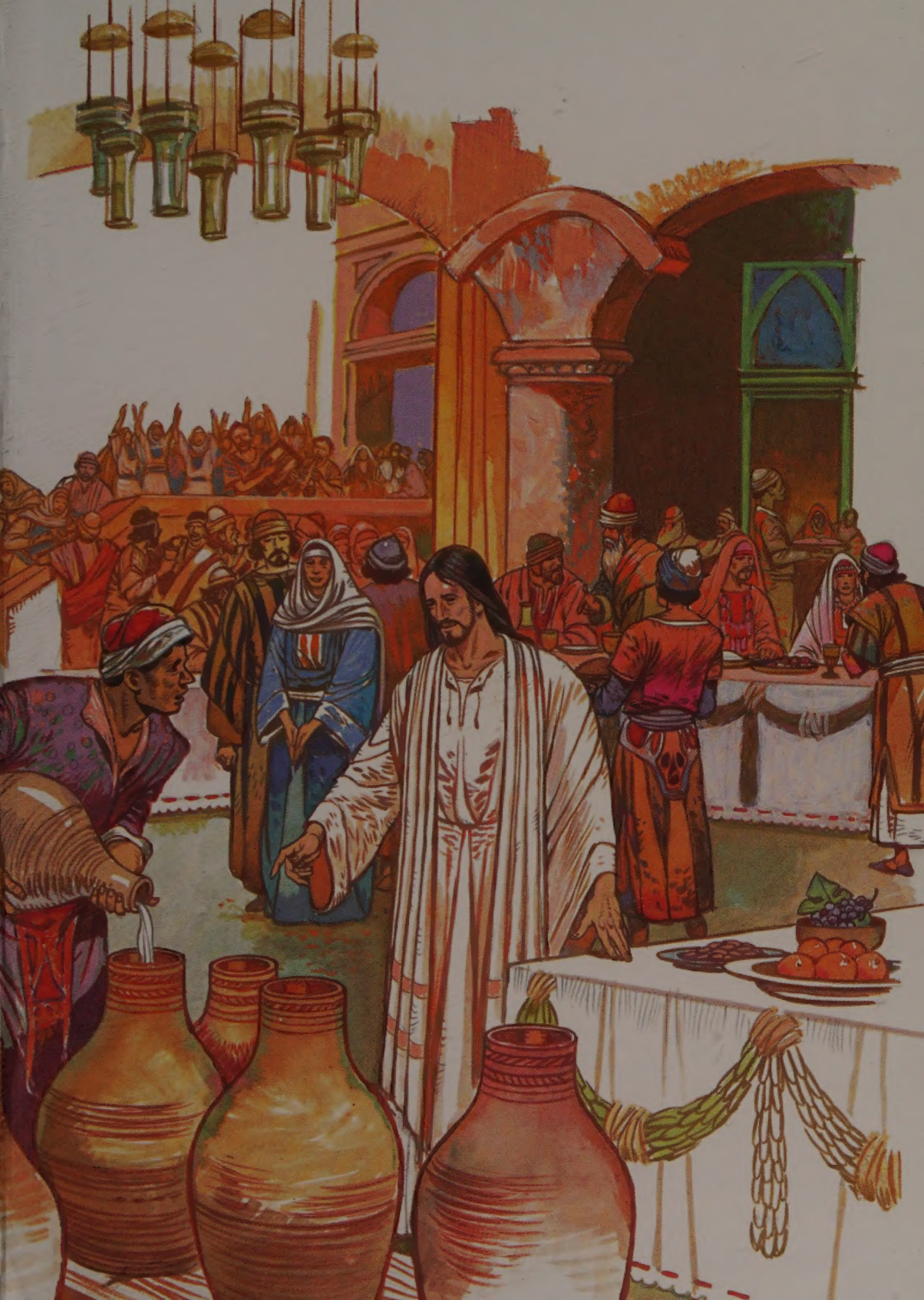
Everyone who hears this must also say, "Come!"

Come, whoever is thirsty. Whoever wants the water of life accept it as a gift.

Jesus is the One who says that these things are true. Now he says, "Yes, indeed! I am coming soon!" Let it be so. Come, Lord Jesus! May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with everyone! Amen!

God is strong and can help you not to fall. He can bring you to stand before him without any wrong in you. He can give you great joy. Jesus Christ our Lord is the only God who saves us. To him be glory, majesty, power, and greatness, for all times past, for now and for ever and ever! Amen!

Jude 24 and 25



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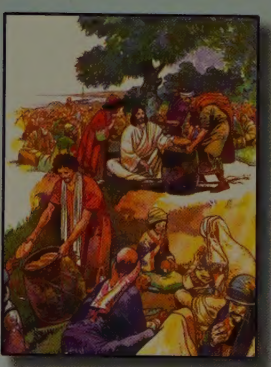

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